THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY®

@Gamer

ISSUE 017 | MARCH 2012

2011 GAME OF THE YEAR

We crown the year's best games.
PG. 42

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

$135 WORTH OF COUPONS!

Including $15 off Final Fantasy XIII-2
PG. 31

HANDS-ON

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

DEPLOY TO DUBAI FOR A FRESH TAKE ON MILITARY SHOOTERS! PG. 34

PS Vita Launch Reviewed!

Is Sony's latest handheld worth your cash? PG. 56

Star Wars: The Old Republic

The Force is strong with BioWare's new MMO. PG. 62

$4.99US

4 00047 70241 5

BEST BUY

Future

SAVE YOUR PEOPLE | CONQUER THE STARS

SUMMER 2012

LEGENDS OF PEGASUS

CONQUER SPACE AND RULE THE UNIVERSE!

4X STRATEGY
EXPLORE! EXPAND!
EXPLOIT! EXTERMINATE!

www.kalypsomedia.com

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.

kalypso

NOVACORE STUDIOS

PC DVD ROM

Legends Of Pegasus Copyright © 2012 Kalypso Media Group. All rights reserved. Developed by Novacore Studios. Published by Kalypso Media USA Inc. All other logos, copyrights and trademarks are property of their respective owner.

"...Exciting from beginning to end."
IGN

"...Hard Reset is truly a great experience."
Destructoid

"In terms of quality, it's on the same level as any AAA shooter out there."
GamesRadar

HARD RESET
EXTENDED EDITION

AVAILABLE MARCH 13, 2012

www.hardresetextended.com

PC DVD ROM

flying wild hog

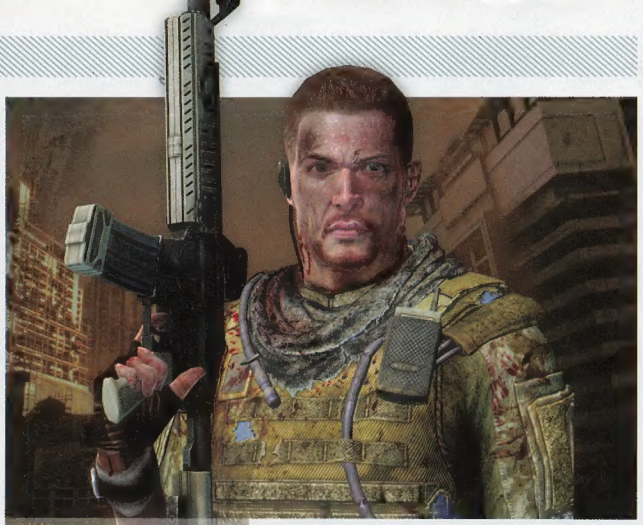
kalypso

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.

Hard Reset - Extended Edition Copyright © 2012 Flying Wild Hog. All rights reserved. Developed by Flying Wild Hog Published by Kalypso Media USA Inc. All other logos, copyrights and trademarks are property of their respective owner.

In this ISSUE 17

THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST Buy®
@GAMER
2011 GAME OF THE YEAR
$135 WORTH OF COUPONS!
HANDS-ON
SPEC OPS: THE LINE
DEPLOY TO DUSAF FOR A FRESH TAKE ON MILITARY SHOOTERS! PG. 34
PS Vita Launch Reviewed!
Star Wars: The Old Republic



COVER STORY

34 SPEC OPS: THE LINE
We get hands-on with 2K's first foray into the military shooter genre. Can it put the heat on the big boys?

56 PS VITA
Sony's latest handheld is here. We put the launch titles through their paces.

VITA IS HERE

91 GEAR
Gaming isn't just about the games. The fact remains that you need the best gear if you want the best gaming experience possible. We've got you covered.

50 BUILD YOUR OWN GAMING PC!
Building your own gaming PC is easier than you think.

Previews

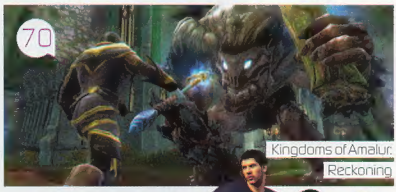
14 Counter-Strike: Global Offensive
Can the fourth game in this storied franchise win us over? Again?

18 Dead or Alive V
Team Ninja returns with the latest installment in a long-running fighting-game series.

20 The Walking Dead: The Game
Based on the graphic novels of the same name, we get a peek at what to expect when this zombie game hits later this year.

22 Darksiders II
War was fun and all, but being able to play as his brother Death is just a little more exciting.

26 Sorcery
Sony hopes that this second-generation Move title will get us all...well, moving.



NEWS: FIRST TO KNOW

04 STAFF
Who runs this jungle, anyway?

06 BLIPS
We have all the news that's fit to blip!

08 TABLET GAMES
You've got a tablet. We've got gaming expertise on tap.

10 THE OLD REPUBLIC
Best Buy hosted a midnight opening for *Star Wars: The Old Republic* that was out of this world.

12 CALENDAR
Release dates? Why, yes, we do have them.

Top Picks

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC 62
Would-be Jedis rejoice while the spouses moan.

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2 66
Don't let the crazy name fool you. *FFXIII-2* is as good as it gets.

KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING 70
Could *Reckoning* be the sleeper hit of 2012? Read on to find out.

SSX 72
EA goes back to its roots for some over-the-top snowboarding action.

SOULCALIBUR V 74
Weep or not for the Sega Dreamcast, but this series is great!

THE DARKNESS II 76
We've seen the ads a million times. But how does the game hold up?

UFC UNDISPUTED 3 78
The king of the virtual octagon is back, but how does it hold up?

FIFA STREET 79
Fans of the beautful game love *FIFA*. Will they love its arcade-like lil bro?

MLB 2K12 80
It's that time again: time to try to win $1M playing a videogame.

SYNDICATE 82
A reboot of the 1993 classic, can this version bring back the magic?

EIGHT MINI REVIEWS! 84
Metal Gear Solid Snake Eater 3D, Resident Evil: Revelations, Tekken 3D Prime Edition, Silent Hill HD Collection, Grand Slam Tennis, Crush3D, Tales of Graces f, and *Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2.*

MEET THE STAFF

Andy Eddy Executive Editor
When he's not toiling away in the @GAMER salt mines, Andy likes to while away the time immersed in everything San Jose Sharks. A native of NY, it's no surprise that he's a hockey fan. Of course, anyone who knows Andy is well aware of his extensive line of Sharks paraphernalia.

Jenny "Nag Vader" Esdaile Art Director
Last month Jenny told us that she would be spending Valentine's Day with her boyfriend in Las Vegas. Since she already has a green card we thought that maybe she caught the wedding bug from Jillian. It turns out that Jenny just likes drinking and gambling.

Jillian Lungaro Designer
Arguably the biggest nerd on staff, Jillian was superstoked about this month's Build-It feature. So stoked, in fact, that after the machine was built, photographed, and tested, she picked over it like a vulture does a carcass. We see some PC game reviews in her not-too-distant future.

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER

Dubai is a fascinating place. Replete with casinos and the kind of nightlife that would put Las Vegas to shame, it's exactly the kind of place that appeals to someone like me. Of course, not being a millionaire means that the likelihood of me ever visiting the place is slim at best. Enter Spec Ops: The Line from 2K Games.

Since I'll never actually get to visit Dubai I was excited by the chance to take a look at 2K Games's military shooter that's set in the city. Unfortunately for me, however, the Dubai in Spec Ops: The Line is nothing like the glitzy place that exists right now. Rather, it's more like a post-apocalyptic wasteland where roving gangs of rogue soldiers, survivors of all-too-frequent sandstorms, and you are pitched in a battle for survival. Oh well.

In a gaming marketplace overloaded with sequels it's always nice to see a publisher throw its support behind new intellectual properties, and because of that we have high-hopes for this dark military shooter.

William O'Neal
Editor-in-Chief

QR CODES AND HOW THEY WORK

Throughout the magazine you'll notice QR codes for some of the games. Simply install a QR reader for your smartphone (or install the Best Buy app for iPhone or Android), aim it at the QR code, and you'll be taken to a trailer for the game you just scanned.

Staff_

@GAMER

EDITORIAL
GROUP EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Chuck Osborn
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF William O'Neal
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Andy Eddy
CONTRIBUTORS Matt Cabral, David Chapman, Jonathan Cooper, Nathan Edwards, Russ Frushtick, Gord Goble, Andrew Hayward, Neilie Johnson, George Jones, Heidi Kemps, Sterling McGarvey, Evan Narcisse, Dennis Scimeca, Ryan Scott, Paul Semel, Timothy J. Seppala, Evan Shamoon, Lucas Sullivan
COPY EDITOR Alexandra Hall
GROUP PRODUCTION MANAGER Debra Guilfoyle

ART
ART DIRECTOR Jenny Esdaile
DESIGNERS Jillian Lungaro, Rosemary Pinkham
PHOTOGRAPHER Samantha Berg

BUSINESS
GROUP ACCOUNT DIRECTOR David Barrow
VP, MEDIA Ursula Morgan
VP, CONSUMER MEDIA Kelly Corten

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
Brandie Rushing: brushing@futureus.com
T: 336 492 2265
VP, SALES AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Nathan Hunt: nhunt@futureus.com
C: 415 269 5402
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF SALES
Isaac Ugay: iugay@futureus.com
C: 714 381 3419

PRODUCTION
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Michael Hollister
PRODUCTION MANAGER Larry Briseno
SENIOR PRINT ORDER COORDINATOR Jennifer Lim

CONSUMER MARKETING
CONSUMER MARKETING DIRECTOR Stephanie Blake
NEWSSTAND DIRECTOR Bill Shewey
NEWSTAND BUSINESS ANALYST Cheryl Stephenson
DIRECTOR OF eCOMMERCE AND FULFULLMENT Lisa Radler
RETENTION MARKETING MANAGER Mike Hill

FUTURE US, INC.
4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400,
South San Francisco, CA 94080
www.futureus.com
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Rachelle Considine
VP/CFO John Sutton
HUMAN RESOURCES AND OFFICE SERVICES MANAGER, Eric Buksa

BEST BUY CO., INC.
7601 Penn Avenue South
Richfield, Minnesota 55423
www.bestbuy.com

SUBSCRIBER CUSTOMER SERVICE:
@GAMER Customer Care, P.O. Box 5851, Harlan, IA 51593-1351. Online: www.atgamermagazine.com/customerservice. Phone: 800-678-3643. Email GMRcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com.

REPRINTS: Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Online: www.futureus.com.

LEGAL STUFF
@GAMER (ISSN 2160-468X) is published monthly, except bi-monthly in January/February and July/August, by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080, USA. Application to mail at Periodicals Postage Rates is pending at San Bruno, CA and additional mailing offices. Basic subscription rates: one year (10 issues) US $14.99. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *@GAMER*, P.O. Box 5852, Harlan, IA 51593-1352. Ride-Along Enclosure in the following editions: None. Standard Mail Enclosure in the following editions: None. Future US, Inc. also publishes *Crochet Today!, Your Knitting Life, MacLife, Maximum PC, Nintendo Power, The Official Xbox Magazine, PlayStation: The Official Magazine, PC Gamer, and Windows: The Official Magazine.* Entire contents copyright 2012, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of *@GAMER*. Products named in the pages of *@GAMER* are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

@GAMER is published in association with Best Buy.

FUTURE plc
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
www.futureplc.com / Tel +44 1225 442244
NON-EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN Peter Allen
GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE Mark Wood
GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR Graham Harding

As a gamer and an avid golfer I've held out buying a Kinect until a quality golf game comes out. Could you let me know if I'll soon be able to play some of the best courses in the world?

–Tim via email

ED: You're in luck. We spoke to our friends at EA Sports and *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13* will fully support the Kinect sensor.

That said, Kinect is not required to play. EA Sports did reiterate however that, "obviously golf games are a natural fit when it comes to motion-based gaming." Look for *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13* to hit store shelves on March 27.

▲ Time to dust off that Kinect.

I have noticed that you seem to have a slight Xbox 360 bias. When you review most multiplatform games, you usually review it on the 360. If you can and it is applicable, could you indicate which console version of the game is the best and other details, like how many DVDs did they use for the 360 version? That way, the consumers that have the choice, can purchase the best-playing version of the game. PlayStation 3 owners should be informed if the game they are interested in buying is a buggy mess (*Fallout: New Vegas*, *Skyrim*, anyone?). Of course, gamers can always glean that unless you mention something, that the game plays the same on both consoles.

–Scott W. via email

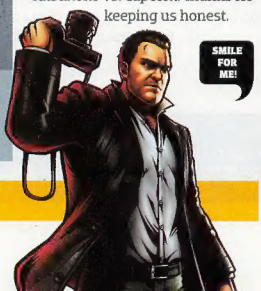
ED: While you're astute to notice that we review more games on Xbox 360 than we do on PS3, it's not really a bias: It's logistics. We generally get access to early "review builds" of games before they're released, which only play on special hardware, and Microsoft has provided more of the Xbox 360 debug systems to the media than Sony has PS3 debugs. And we also get Xbox 360 builds from publishers more often, because they know our limitations.

We're also time-limited in getting our reviews compiled; we could have a reviewer look at every version of the game, but that would take much more time, bringing the review to you in a later issue...and it's not usually necessary, as the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions are often similar in features, appearance, and, frankly, in bugginess. While we certainly try to point out to readers when there are platform differences or problems with the game, it'll always be a battle between getting you timely information vs. getting you complete information.

As I was reading issue 16 in your review of *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, I noticed that you referred to the title as being the fighting debut appearance of the added characters including Frank West. Frank West has appeared in *Tatsunoko vs. Capcom*, the largely overlooked Wii gem. In fact, *TvC* introduced a very similar revamped control system that *MvC3* now uses. I'm sure you've already received mail regarding this fact. However, this is not the first publication to ignore this amazing title.

–Anonymous via email

ED: Busted! You are in fact correct. We talked to the good folks at Capcom and they confirmed that Frank West did appear in Tatsunoko vs. Capcom. Thanks for keeping us honest.



GAMING TRENDS, 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

Follow us!

Get more at @GAMER

TWEETER: WIL O'NEAL TWITTER: @GAMER_WONEAL
It's 2012 and I still have games from 2010 to play. Can everybody stop making new games for a while so that I can catch up? #KThxBai

TWEETER: ANDY EDDY TWITTER: @VIDGAMES
I thought the end of 2011 would let me to catch up on games...but now I've got *FFXIII-2*...and then *Darkness II*, *SSX* and *Syndicate*.

TWEETER: ANDREW HAYWARD TWITTER: @AHAYWA
Have now seen the *Darkness II* commercial a couple dozen times in the last three days. Mercy, please.

TWEETER: EVAN NARCISSE TWITTER: @EVNARC
If I ever have a son, I won't name him after me. New Game+ Narcisse should suffice.

PODCAST atgamerpodcast.com
[Tune in for the latest information about the games industry from the front lines.]

BEST BUY CUSTOMER REVIEWS & RATINGS

WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

What are you playing now? Do you like it? Do you hate it? Let the other @GAMER readers know what you think—send in a short 50- to 100-word review to reviews@atgamermagazine.com, and we'll post some of them here each issue.

Submit your review to:
reviews@atgamermagazine.com

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

With compelling dungeons and puzzles, Skyward Sword is the greatest motion game to date, with everything you do in the game; from swinging your sword, or flying a Loftwing, requiring motion gestures. Sure, many will complain about the hand holding, pacing and dialog. But while it doesn't reinvent the Zelda wheel, it's a fun game with compelling gameplay and a good story.

Score: 4.5/5

–Joe L.

BEST BUY rewardzone
GAMERS CLUB [UNLOCKED]

We know you can't live without your monthly dose of @GAMER. Go to your local Best Buy and join the all-new Reward Zone Gamers Club Unlocked program for $14.99 to get a full year's subscription and other exclusive benefits. Trust us, it's that easy.

[Note: Letters may be edited for size and clarity.]

Blips...

News, rumors, and game culture deconstructed

NEWS BITES

Wii U

The Wii U will be released worldwide by the end of the year. The console's final form will be unveiled at E3 in June.

X-COM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

2K Games plans to ship strategy reboot *X-COM: Enemy Unknown* this fall, while the separate *X-COM* shooter has been delayed to 2013.

SUPER MARIO

Nintendo says it will release an all-new 2D *Super Mario* game for the Nintendo 3DS within the coming fiscal year.

RESIDENT EVIL RETURNS!

RE6 IT'S BACK!

Infected appendages can't compete with Leon's sidearm.

Granted, the series didn't really go anywhere—check out our review of *Resident Evil: Revelations* for Nintendo 3DS in this very issue—but the core series is back in action later this year with the newly announced *Resident Evil 6*.

Crossing the paths of two beloved series heroes, *Resident Evil 6* looks to appease fans of the classic horrorcentric entries while embracing an even more intense action approach in some respects.

Part of the game puts you in the shoes of Leon Kennedy, who finds himself in a small town infested by shambling, infested enemies. Meanwhile, Chris Redfield engages in a full-on, guns-blazing assault in the neon-lit streets of China. Capcom says the mixed approach results in "dramatic horror," and the separate pursuits seem sure to intertwine at some point.

Resident Evil 6 promises co-op play and several new characters, and it's set to debut on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 on November 20, 2012.

BEST BUY BONUS

STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

Customize your fighters' speed and skills with the Lightning Legs GEM Pack, yours free via download code when you pre-order Street Fighter X Tekken for Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 from BestBuy.com.

THE RAPTR REPORT

What are the hottest games being played by Xbox 360 and PC gamers? Raptr.com has the answer.

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

1	Star Wars: The Old Republic
2	Armored Core V
3	Gotham City Impostors
4	Hidden Chronicles
5	UFC Undisputed 3 Demo
6	Rift
7	Dragon Age II
8	Portal 2
9	Quarrel
10	Soulcalibur V
11	League of Legends
12	Kingdoms of Camelot
13	Final Fantasy XIII-2
14	Mass Effect 2
15	The Witcher 2

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

INSIDE GOSSIP

2K MARIN'S FRESH PROJECT

It sounds like *BioShock 2* developer 2K Marin is up to something new. Studio cofounder J.R. Hogarth de la Plante's resume says he's working on an "unannounced project," which is a brand-new property being devised by a five-person team at present. 2K Marin is also still working on the *X-COM* shooter, which was recently delayed into 2013.

IN THE WORKS

Jiggly-what? \\

Pokémon + Nobunaga's Ambition pairs the creatures with feudal Japanese warriors for a crossover strategy affair on Nintendo DS.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Q ENTERTAINMENT – MEGURO, TOKYO, JAPAN

ELECTRIC EXPERIENCES

Q Entertainment is located in Meguro, Tokyo, where it's been since forming in 2003. The studio has two buildings: one for its console, mobile, and social games—like *Child of Eden* and *Lumines*—and another for its free-to-play MMO titles.

NERD WORDS...

UNCHARTED

Nathan Drake's enigmatic past came to light in *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*, but if that fantastic PlayStation 3 adventure wasn't enough to whet your appetite for all things Drake, perhaps *Uncharted: The Fourth Labyrinth* will do the trick. Based on the characters from Naughty Dog's franchise, *The Fourth Labyrinth* is an original novel from author Christopher Golden and Del Rey Books, wherein a winding journey begins when an old pal of Drake's mentor Victor Sullivan is found dead in Manhattan. *Uncharted: The Fourth Labyrinth* is available now in paperback for $15.00, as well as eBook formats.

DON'T FORGET THE POPCORN!

AT THE MOVIES

An indie documentary about indie games earns major props, plus a big action adaptation gains some momentum.

INDIE GAME: THE MOVIE

Following the creators behind beloved indie games like *Super Meat Boy* and *Braid*, this low-budget documentary recently beat the competition to win for Best Editing in its category at the Sundance Film Festival. The celebrated film is currently in limited release, and will hit DVD and digital formats thereafter.

JUST CAUSE: SCORPION RISING

The live-action film inspired by the open-world *Just Cause* game series will be titled *Just Cause: Scorpion Rising*, according to recent reports, and spotlight agent Rico Rodriguez (The Scorpion) from the games. Comic scribe Bryan Edward Hill was brought in to rewrite the original script from Michael Ross (*Turistas*).

Five Questions with...

CLAIM TO FAME...
Dopest DJ in the gaming industry!

JAMES MIELKE

Q Entertainment's Producer

1 What does being a producer at Q Entertainment entail?

My job involves creating new IPs and game designs, assembling my team, and deciding on visual approach and sound design, as well as organizing contracts, budgets, schedules, and legal stuff.

2 What was the biggest challenge in transitioning from writing about games to making them?

Having to dispense with all of my preconceptions of what game development was about, and accepting that I would have to develop an entirely new skillset. This isn't to say that my knowledge as a gaming editor wasn't useful—it has been very useful. But you don't become a chef overnight just because you like to eat food. Still, I was able to adapt pretty quickly.

3 Among your many signed videogames, which is your most cherished and why?

My signed Ico (by Fumito Ueda) and *Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time* (by Shigeru Miyamoto) are pretty hard to top, but my signed Japanese version of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for Sega Saturn is the jewel in my crown. A producer at Sega went around and got the original team members—which by then had been long disbanded—and had them sign the game for me.

4 What excites you these days outside of gaming?

Fatherhood is certainly a new challenge that demands more of me every day, but anything that keeps me busy creatively—like music, painting, and writing—is very fulfilling. I've also been doing a lot of skateboarding lately, too.

5 How is it living and working in Japan after being in the States for so long?

I'd always wanted to live in Japan and I've been here nearly three years, but it's a big adjustment. I'm guessing for many gamers this would seem like a dream come true, and in many ways it is. But things are so different culturally. Japan is strange in how it's both technologically advanced and backwards at the same time.

Words: Andrew Hayward

Featured Game:

BETTER "BLADE"

Suit up in an epic, RPG-tinged iPad adventure.

Two blades are better than one.

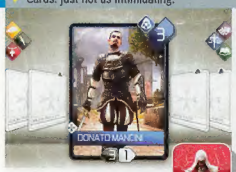
INFINITY BLADE II

Platforms:

$6.99, Chair Entertainment, infinitybladegame.com

Unsheathe your virtual sword in the sequel to the iPad's boldest original adventure, which expands the winning combatcentric formula with the ability to dual-wield smaller blades, plus explore beyond the main path. As in the first entry, *Infinity Blade II* lets you command and customize a warrior through victory and defeat—and the latter point is essential here, as you will undoubtedly perish along the way. Luckily, you'll restart the quest with all of your weapons and abilities intact, which fosters a strong connection with your character as you dodge attacks and slay massive beasts. It doesn't hurt that *Infinity Blade II* is absolutely stunning, easily dethroning its predecessor as the iPad's top showcase title.

Cards: just not as intimidating.



ASSASSIN'S CREED RECOLLECTION

Platforms:

$0.99, Ubisoft, ubisoft.com

Unlike the open-world action entries on consoles, *Assassin's Creed Recollection* is a digital collectable card game, in which you'll craft a deck comprised of characters, scenarios, and locations inspired by the franchise—then battle it out in a lengthy story mode or online against pals and random foes. It's a surprising new direction for the series, but strong production values and tactical play make it an interesting option, even for folks who usually skip card games.

How can you resist petting him?

KINECTIMALS

Platforms:

$2.99, Microsoft, microsoft.com

Kinectimals debuted on the Xbox 360 (via Kinect), but this iPad and Windows Phone release reimagines the virtual pet simulator with touch controls, while maintaining the original name. Choosing from several adorable wild cats, you'll interact with them on an island resort via gestures, making them jump and flip with swipes of your finger. Plus, you can play various minigames with each cat. It's simple—but still good, polished fun for youngsters.

The Hedgehog runs rampant again!

SONIC CD

Platforms:

$4.99 (iPad), $2.99 (Android), Sega, sega.com

Most fans of Sonic the Hedgehog probably missed his lone Sega CD platform release, but thanks to this sterling re-release on iPad and Android, it's now possible to enjoy one of the best series entries to date. *Sonic CD* is all classic blue blur action circa 1993, with bright side-scrolling worlds for him to blaze through, plus slicker music and visuals than were possible on the Genesis. And unlike many retro ports, these touch controls shine.

Wolverine gets his own themed table.

ZEN PINBALL

Platforms:

Free, Zen Studios, zenstudios.com

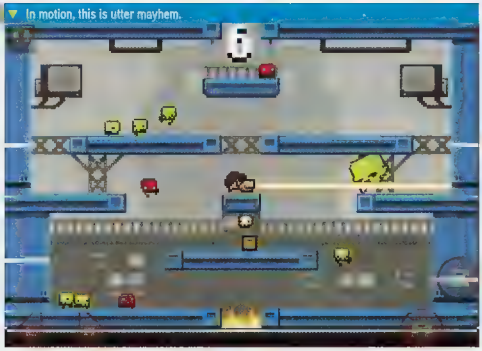
Physical pinball machines may be on the decline, but *Zen Pinball* puts the same play sensation in the palm of your hands, thanks to accurate ball physics and incredibly well-designed virtual tables. Tapping the left and right side of the screen triggers the respective flippers, but you won't need a sock full of quarters to take down these machines: One magic-themed table comes free, and Marvel Comics-themed options are just a couple bucks apiece.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Platforms:

$4.99, Rockstar Games, rockstargames.com

Just in time for its tenth anniversary, the most influential open-world game ever is now available in its full glory for Android and iPad. Everything you loved about the violent crime saga remains intact, from the intense police chases to the many hilarious and memorable radio stations. The virtual directional pad and buttons are adequate, but not a perfect substitute for physical controls; still, it's hard to argue with a portable *Grand Theft Auto III*.



SUPER CRATE BOX

Platforms:

$0.99, Vlambeer, vlambeer.com

Super Crate Box might look cute and colorful, with a throwback style that recalls the pixel-centric days of yore—but it's tough as nails. The goal is simple: Collect as many crates as possible before perishing, but each one you grab amps up the flow of foes into the room. Luckily, the fresh crates also yield new weapons (such as a shotgun or mines), though everything moves so quickly that it's hard to settle down to take a shot. It's brutally addictive.

Shamble into the App Store

UNDEAD ATTACK

Watch Out!

Zombies are all the rage in pop culture right now, infesting everything from film and television to videogames (*NFL Blitz*, really?)—and tablet games are no exception. Here are 10 top zombie-packing portable experiences.

01 CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS ZOMBIES ($6.99, activision.com)
The hit bonus mode from the console series is a standalone app on iPad, allowing four-player online co-op, plus an additional arcade-like, top-down shooting mode.

02 ZOMBIE FARM (Free, zombiefarmgame.com)
Rather than slay the undead, you'll plant and harvest them in *Zombie Farm*, a colorful take on the free-to-play *Farmville* formula. Repetitive, but addicting.

03 AGE OF ZOMBIES ANNIVERSARY ($1.99, ageofzombies.com)
Cartoonish zombies are toppled en masse in this amusing shooter, which stars a time-traveling goof named Barry Steakfries, who packs both quips and firearms.

04 ZOMBIE GUNSHIP ($0.99, limbic.com)
Why get up close and personal? *Zombie Gunship* lets you blast away the shambling hordes from the comfort of the air, with various violent weapons at your disposal.

05 PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES HD ($6.99, popcap.com)
PopCap's smash casual hit has infested nearly every platform, but it's truly best on a touchscreen tablet, where you can place zombie-battling foliage with elegant ease.

06 ZOMBIE HIGHWAY ($0.99, renderpazstudios.com)
Escaping the zombie apocalypse in a van isn't as easy as you might think, as *Zombie Highway* tosses the aggressive foes onto your moving vehicle. Shake them off!

07 JUDGE DREDD VS. ZOMBIES (Free, fusepowered.com)
Underground comic hero Judge Dredd makes his iPad debut battling familiar foes, which shed neon-green blood upon death. The free app includes three full episodes.

08 ZOMBIE LIFE (Free, zombielife.com)
The mere thought of a zombie "life simulator" is confounding, but this freebie takes a page out of *The Sims*'s playbook, letting them build friendships and even work jobs.

09 CALL OF MINI: ZOMBIES ($0.99, minitigames.net)
Though the name parodies *Call of Duty*, the actual game is a more cartoonish affair, as you'll guide cute avatars around a small town to dispense anti-zombie justice.

10 ZOMBIESMASH HD ($3.99, zynga.com)
Billed a "survival comedy" game, *ZombieSmash* lets you pulverize undead invaders with amusing results using rocket launchers, mines, liquid nitrogen, and more.

▼ "Buy this game or we're going to fire haphazardly at you and miss."

EVENTS YOU CAN'T MISS!

Best Buy's *Star Wars: The Old Republic* Midnight Opening

On December 20th, 2011, BioWare and LucasArts launched the new MMO, *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, at special midnight events at Best Buy stores in New York City and Austin, TX. Our cameras were there to capture all the fun, as fans lined up early (and in costume!) to be among the first to get their hands on the game and rub lightsabers with its creators.

At Best Buy's New York Union Square store, EA gave away lithographs to the crowd, which they could then have autographed by BioWare's cofounders Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka. In Austin, where the game was developed, fans had the opportunity to meet with the development team and get their new purchases signed.

Some of those in attendance showed up in full Star Wars regalia, wearing costumes that would probably reflect their character choices in the game, such as stormtroopers and Jedis. A few even dressed as characters found outside *The Old Republic* timeline, such as Darth Maladi from the *Star Wars: Legacy* series of comic books.

It was undoubtedly a long night for everyone involved. We bet these fans were up playing the game well into the next morning! (For our review of *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, see p.60.)

Fans lined up early and in costume to be the first to get their hands on the game

▼ Those who stood in line got free swag, like caps and signed lithographs.

▲ Patient fans show off their goodie bags as they eagerly wait their turn to buy the game.

▲ *Star Wars: The Old Republic* can make friends out of stormtroopers, Jawas, and Jedi Knights.

▲ BioWare cofounders Dr. Ray Muzyka (center) and Dr. Greg Zeschuk (far right) pose with an early buyer.

▲ "Darth Maladi" goes into a Force trance while waiting for her lithograph to be signed by the developers.

CALENDAR

MARCH 2012

■ Game Release Date ■ The @GAMER Podcast ↘ This day in videogame history...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
ARE YOU A PRE-ORDER PRO? If you want to keep tabs on all of the pre-order specials that Best Buy and game publishers have put together, just scan this QR code with your smartphone. One webpage will tell all!		**APRIL 2012 HIGHLIGHTS:** Kinect Star Wars: [illegible] The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings: [illegible] Prototype 2: [illegible]		01	02 THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 36	03
SEE PAGE 80	04	05	06 Crush3D ▪ LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5–7 (PS Vita) ▪ Mass Effect 3 ▪ MLB 2K12 ▪ MLB 12 The Show ▪ Nicktoons MLB (3DS) ▪ Reality Fighters ▪ Street Fighter X Tekken ▪ Silent Hill HD Collection ▪ Unit 13	07	08	09	10
11 Mario Party 9 DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS	12	13 ▪ FIFA Street ▪ Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations ▪ Silent Hill Downpour ▪ Tales of Graces f ▪ Yakuza Dead Souls	14	15	16	17 ST. PATRICK'S DAY
18	19	20 ▪ Armored Core V ▪ Kinect Rush ▪ Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City FIRST DAY OF SPRING	21	22	23 ▪ Kid Icarus: Uprising	24
	26	27 ▪ Rhythm Thief & The Emperor's Treasure ▪ Ridge Racer Unbounded ▪ Silent Hill Book of Memories ▪ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	28	29 SEE PAGE 79	30 THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 38	31

ALL GAME NAMES ARE LISTED ON THEIR RESPECTIVE RELEASE DATES. LISTINGS SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE. FOR MORE INFO, GO TO BESTBUY.COM
TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE @GAMER PODCAST, GO TO ATGAMERPODCAST.COM

Official XBOX 360®

Exclusive Gaming Headsets

POWERED BY TRITTON®

DETONATOR™
STEREO HEADSET

50mm

MP3+PHONE

Superior Bass Response

DETONATOR™ STEREO HEADSET
Now Available.

BEST BUY

TRITTONUSA.COM

BRING THIS IMAGE TO LIFE
on your smartphone now!

1. Open a 'barcode scanner' application on your smartphone (such as neoreader or bakodo, available on the Android market).
2. Point your phone's camera at the code and scan

©2012 Mad Catz, Inc. Mad Catz, TRITTON, Detonator, the Mad Catz logo and the TRITTON logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Mad Catz, Inc., its subsidiaries and affiliates. The shape and design of this product are a trade dress of Mad Catz. This product is manufactured under license from Microsoft Corporation. Microsoft, Kinect, Xbox, Xbox LIVE, Xbox 360, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies.

MAD CATZ

COUNTER-STRIKE: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE

The legend returns to claim the FPS throne • Words: Lucas Sullivan

Before Halo or Modern Warfare existed, Counter-Strike was the premier tactical shooter that tested the hardcore gamer's mettle. With no vehicles, sentry guns, loadouts, or regenerating health, all you had to prove your worth was your weapon-aiming skill and your teamwork. Now, with 13 years of experience under its belt, CS is back to show these rookies who's boss. What started out as a mere port for PlayStation Network and Xbox Live Arcade has grown into Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, the newest installment in the reputable first-person shooter franchise.

If you haven't played Valve's most popular game of all time, here's the rundown: Siding with the Terrorist or Counter-Terrorist forces, you have one life to complete an objective or eliminate the opposing team. Once one side lies dead or the mission's accomplished, gun money is awarded based on performance and a new three-minute round starts. Depending on the map, Terrorists are tasked with detonating a bomb, while CTs must rescue hostages. Aside from playing against bots, there's no single-player campaign to speak of—everything about CS is player-driven, from the tense paranoia of being your team's last man standing, to the nerve-wracking thrill of defusing a bomb at the last possible second.

Global Offensive looks to build off the legacy of one of PC gaming's greatest shooters, making it accessible to greenhorns and going toe-to-toe with the Call of Duty and Battlefields of the world. Tweaks to familiar map layouts, new weaponry, and a matchmaking system mean that old-school CS players have reason to be intrigued, and the overhauled graphics make previous versions look cartoony by comparison. If my time in the closed beta has shown me anything, it's that Global Offensive may be the perfect introduction to Counter-Strike's fundamental gameplay for a new generation of virtual soldiers.

DON'T TASE ME, BRO!

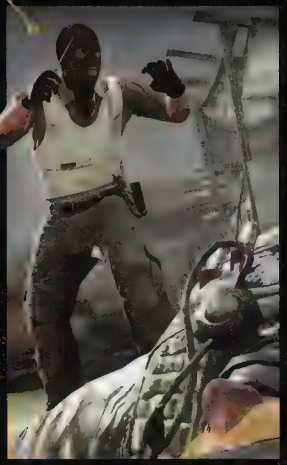
Valve's taken great care to ensure that newcomers won't be run over by frizzled veterans. The Casual option eases you in with free body armor and reduced gun prices. But don't worry, experts—you'll feel right at home in the Competitive scene, which tracks your ranking and pits you against players with an equally high ELO. You can also ruthlessly humiliate foes with the Zeus x27, a $1000, single-shot taser. Ouch.

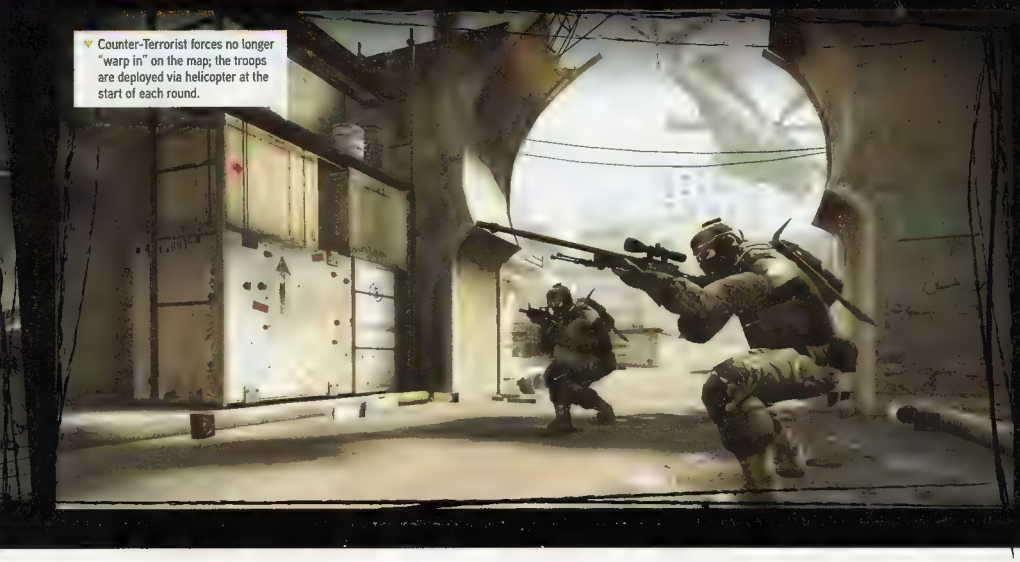
Fancy yourself a heavy weapons guy? The gargantuan M249 machine gun is perfect for giving the opposition a Swiss-cheese makeover.

GRENADIER'S DELIGHT Smoke grenades are super effective for defense, and *GO*'s new tossable weapons give you additional non-lethal options. The Molotov cocktail has the biggest impact in terms of strategy, blocking off a pathway with a massive wall of flame. It acts primarily as a movement-denying tool—the negligible burn damage isn't likely to net you any kills. Decoy grenades emit the sound of gunfire and footsteps wherever you've lobbed them, so you can use the art of misdirection to sneak in for the kill.

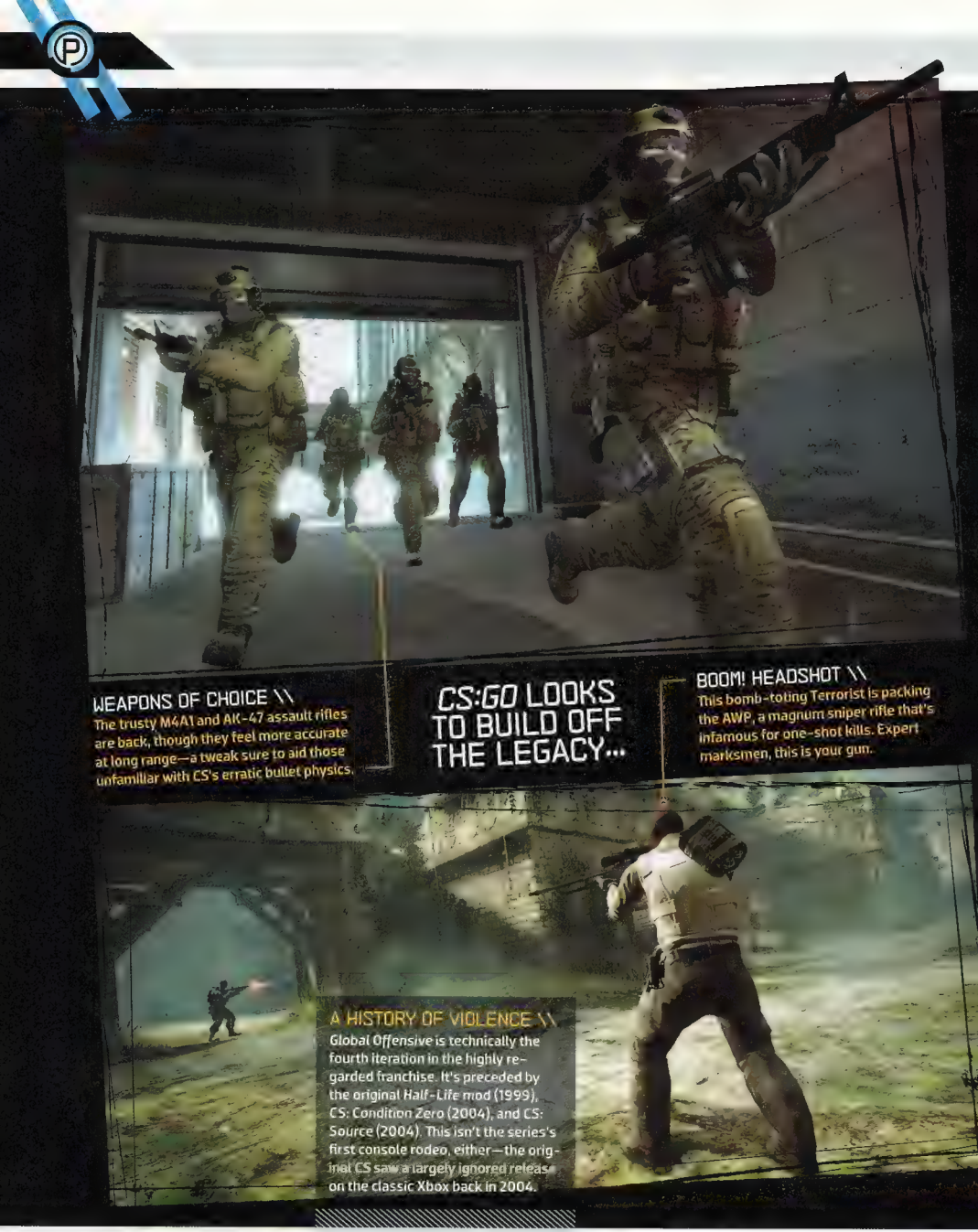
UP YOUR ARSENAL

The incredibly addicting "Gun Game" *CS* mod has gone official in *GO* as the Arms Race mode. You'll work through every single weapon, leveling up with each kill to bigger and better artillery. Only the knife can score the game-winning deathblow—but slicing your prey is tough when they're pointing an automatic shotgun at your face.





Counter-Terrorist forces no longer "warp in" on the map; the troops are deployed via helicopter at the start of each round.



WEAPONS OF CHOICE \\

The trusty M4A1 and AK-47 assault rifles are back, though they feel more accurate at long range—a tweak sure to aid those unfamiliar with CS's erratic bullet physics.

CS:GO LOOKS TO BUILD OFF THE LEGACY...

BOOM! HEADSHOT \\

This bomb-toting Terrorist is packing the AWP, a magnum sniper rifle that's infamous for one-shot kills. Expert marksmen, this is your gun.

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE \\

Global Offensive is technically the fourth iteration in the highly regarded franchise. It's preceded by the original *Half-Life* mod (1999), *CS: Condition Zero* (2004), and *CS: Source* (2004). This isn't the series's first console rodeo, either—the original CS saw a largely ignored release on the classic Xbox back in 2004.

Series vets will be happy to hear instantly recognizable radio chatter, such as "Fire in the hole!" and "Team, fall back!"

CROSSING THE STREAMS Many players were shocked to hear that *CS:GO* will allow for cross-platform play, a dark art that mystifies developers. How do you balance a game where players using their thumbs on an analog stick stare down people wielding the superior aim of a mouse? The details are fuzzy, but Valve insists it's shunning such crutches as autoaim and input lag. The last cross-platform FPS was 2007's Shadowrun—which was met with near-universal disdain.

When you're dead, you're dead—there aren't any Final Stand or Martyrdom perks to save you here.

Getting mowed down rewards you with a nifty zoom-in killcam shot of your executioner, à la *Team Fortress 2*.

**VIEW TO A KILL ** Fancy effects, such as crisp shadows and dust clouds, put the graphics on par with competitors, but Valve claims that visual niceties are secondary to maintaining the patented *CS* gameplay.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

COUNTER-STRIKE: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE

INFO
Publisher: Valve Software
Developer: Hidden Path Entertainment
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes; beta currently supports 5-on-5 combat

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
FPS fanatics looking to truly test their skill

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

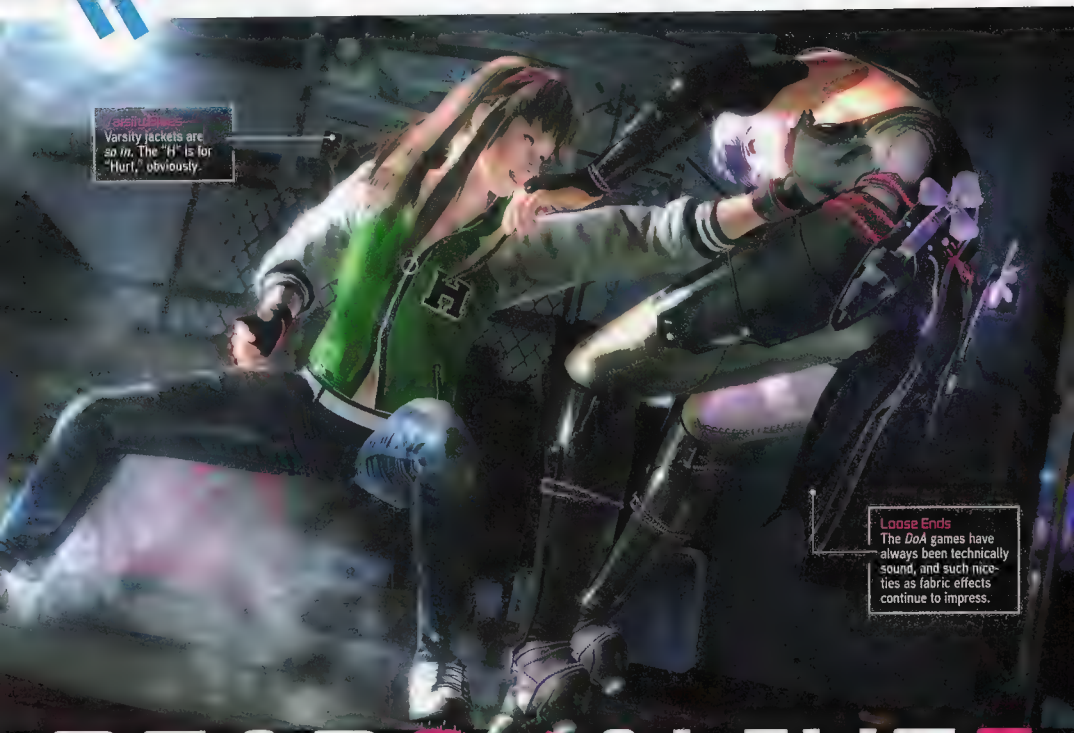
MW3's Search and Destroy mode cribs from *CS*'s bomb-planting, no-respawning formula.

WATCH OUR SCRATCH

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*.

WHAT'S GRE
- Instantly familiar to anyone who's played *CS* before
- Weapons and maps strike the right balance between the old and the new

WHAT'S NOT
- Can Valve really balance cross-platform play?
- Anguished cries from series purists who fear any change


Varsity jackets are so in. The "H" is for "Hurt," obviously.
Loose Ends
The DoA games have always been technically sound, and such niceties as fabric effects continue to impress.

DEAD OR ALIVE 5

Team Ninja busts out some silver-screen inspirations • Words: Evan Shamoon

Dead or Alive has always been known for its explosions on stages and falling off high ledges to different areas on the stage," says Yosuke Hayashi, leader of developer Team Ninja. "In DoA5, you won't simply be falling off buildings; instead, the buildings will crumble underneath your feet. Things won't just explode, but rather set off chain reactions that will take out entire sections of a given stage. "Players will be fighting in the middle of wanton destruction," says Hayashi. "We want to make them feel the excitement and dynamics, as if they were a part of a real-time action flick climax scene."

Indeed, the emphasis on action is immediate. Holding down a trigger charges up an attack that knocks your opponent into the walls, and initiates a "quick-time event" (QTE) in which hitting a button in time will inflict maximum damage. Same thing goes on defense: Get kicked off of a ledge and you'll get your own QTE, where accurate button presses will have your character grab the ledge and avoid a five-story plunge.

> "WE WANT TO MAKE THEM FEEL THE EXCITEMENT AND DYNAMICS..."

Of course, making it feel like more than a gimmick will be a challenge, particularly in the competitive fighting genre. "We are trying to do something new and fresh, something no one has done before, so that is obviously a huge challenge," Hayashi says. "We are trying to keep the system of a fighting game amongst the dynamics and excitement that has never been portrayed before. And we want to make characters feel like living, breathing beings on the stage. In other words, in order to bring the concept of 'fighting entertainment' to life, we needed to go back to basics and rethink about the graphics, use of sound, and the gameplay mechanics in order to realize this concept. It's going to be difficult to achieve but you will definitely feel this from end to end when you play the game."

A DoA5 demo will be packaged with Ninja Gaiden 3. The Xbox 360 demo will have Hayabusa and Hitomi playable, while PS3 players will get Hayate and Ayane. The collector's edition of Ninja Gaiden 3 will make all four characters playable.

▲ TAKE THE FIGHT ONLINE

While the team won't reveal much about it, it is rethinking DoAS's online system. In addition to unranked matches, the mode will be made more accessible for newcomers and deeper for the hardcore. "It's something fit for this generation," Hayashi says.

▲ PACING

"DoA4 was a clash of intense techniques, which interchanged offense and defense very rapidly," Hayashi says. "In DoAS, fights will have the dynamic feel and [the] sense of tension [of an] action movie, and will require players to be more mindful of their timing and distance."

CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

You're getting a bigger lineup

While Tecmo isn't getting too specific, it is promising more fighters than were found in DoA4. So far, Hayabusa (a crossover from Team Ninja's own Ninja Gaiden) and Hayate are back, along with Ayane and Hitomi. We've been told to expect some new faces as well...

▲ "The tempo of gameplay will vary [with] the current state you are in. It's a unique sensation that is very difficult to explain, but when you are in the middle...of these dynamic changes on the stage, players may feel the tempo increase a bit as well to make the fight more heart-pounding."

GAME DETAILS

DEAD OR ALIVE 5

INFO
Publisher: Tecmo Koei
Developer: Team Ninja
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes; no details yet

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Michael Bay devotees, digital pugilists, Fight Club membership holders

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Super Street Fighter IV is the current king of quality console brawlers

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Dead or Alive 5*.

WHAT'S GREAT:

❤ Environmental interactivity could really set this apart from the rest of the fighting-game crop.

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

✖ ...or it could feel like a novelty.
✖ No new characters have been shown (yet).

THE WALKING DEAD

Your next adventure is dead ahead + Words: Evan Shamoon

"This [is] not another zombie shooter game," says Sean Vanaman, designer at Telltale Games, of his development team's upcoming horror adventure title, *The Walking Dead*. "It's a faithful re-creation of Robert Kirkman's world, where resources are scarce and blazing gunfire is a very bad idea. It's a story of human drama and emotion set against the backdrop of a zombie apocalypse."

Indeed, the game takes place in the same bleak world Rick Grimes and his crew from the comics and TV show struggle to survive in. This time around, however, you'll be seeing it through new eyes: specifically those of Lee Everett, as he struggles to protect a small girl named Clementine.

As with any good zombie apocalypse, the team has been especially mindful of tone and character. "We see the comic book as the nucleus of the *Walking Dead* world, so, although we love the TV show, it doesn't inform what happens in our game," Vanaman says. The team is working directly with Kirkman to ensure that the game flows seamlessly into *The Walking Dead* universe. The first episode takes place while Rick is still in the comatose state you see him in at the outset of the television show; you'll meet Glenn before he becomes a part of Rick's group, and key locations, such as Hershel's farm, will make appearances as well. "The farm is the perfect example of how the core story and the game cross over, since you'll be able to see and be a part of how Hershel's son ended up in the infamous barn," Vanaman says.

Also rather unique is the look of the game. Telltale's artists used 2D illustrative techniques to deliver a fresh look to a 3D environment. "The world really feels like *The Walking Dead* to me," Vanaman says. "Our art team has managed to create a visual aesthetic that features heavy nods to the art of the comic book, but it doesn't look like it's trying to be a game that looks like a comic book." Look for the first of five episodic releases around the middle of the year.

"IT'S A FAITHFUL RE-CREATION OF ROBERT KIRKMAN'S WORLD..."

GAME DETAILS

THE WALKING DEAD

INFO
Publisher: Telltale Games
Developer: Telltale Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC, Mac, iOS

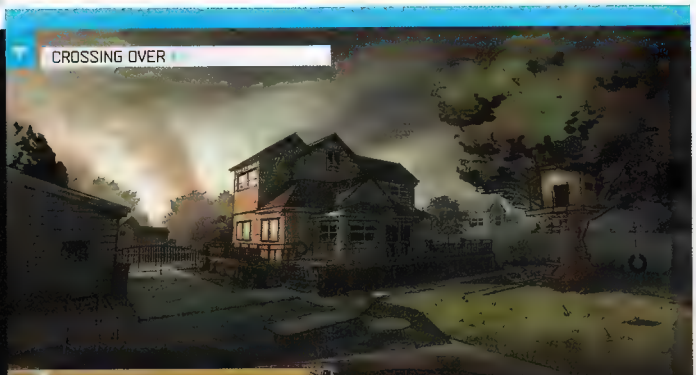
RELEASE DATE
Mid 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Adventure horror

SUITABLE FOR
Zombie hunters, zombies themselves, comic fanatics

CROSSING OVER



▲ The visual style fuses aspects of both the television series and the (beloved) original comic it's based on.

TRANSMEDIA \\

The process of bridging the game between various media has been insightful for the team. "The choices we offer the player include having to choose who lives and who dies," Vanaman says. "But we want to make every choice interesting, so that every time you're tasked with a decision—whether it's an action or through conversation—there's not necessarily a 'right' answer. Figuring out where story and choice cross over has been both difficult and really fun."

▼ Nothing ups the ante on a zombie invasion like having to babysit.

**NO HUGGING ALLOWED ** "In most zombie games, you're shooting hordes of undead, and by and large they're all 'nameless,'" Vanaman says. "Here, most have a backstory—they're people. We've humanized them. That zombie you're about to axe isn't a stranger—it's your brother. The emotional content...is a big area of focus for us."

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

So many choices! I'd have to say that Valve's *Left 4 Dead* remains my favorite, though...

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Source material is excellent and being given the proper respect
- Overall tone and vision seem spot-on

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- We haven't seen actual gameplay as of yet...

DARKSIDERS II

Death becomes him...

Words: Matt Cabral

Don't let his menacing mug fool you—Death's actually a sweet guy.

A surprise critical and commercial success, 2010's *Darksiders* blended fast-paced combat, environmental exploration, and engaging puzzle-solving into an addictive action-adventure many likened to the *Legend of Zelda* series. Given such high praise, developer Vigil Games could have easily polished up its can't-miss formula a bit and churned out a quick cash-in follow-up. However, like War, *Darksiders*'s apocalyptic horseman hero, Vigil has no interest in treading the well-traveled path.

As expected, *Darksiders II* is refining and improving its predecessor's template. In addition to the usual tweaks, though, it's making the rare move of introducing a brand new protagonist; you will still kick epic amounts of monster hide as one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, but this time you're trading War's Chaoseater sword for Death's life-siphoning scythe.

Sure, switching main characters might sound like a bold—even risky—decision, but after seeing the skull-faced Death in action, it's clear he's more than just War re-skinned with a menacing new mask. My demo dropped him in a fitting fire-and-brimstone setting where giant stone golems were intent on making him a permanent part of the architecture. Despite their best Earth-shaking efforts, though, it was obvious they were no match for a warrior who literally deals death for a living. Wielding a pair of scythes—which can be conveniently morphed into a single blade for ranged attacks—Death swiftly reduced the brawny baddies to dust.

Following a few similar encounters, as well as a bit of acrobatic exploration and puzzle-solving, Death faced Ghorn, a rock-based miniboss that made its little brothers look like clumps of kitty litter. Thankfully, Death has some tricks tucked beneath his necromancer armor; triggering "murder" and "exhume," he's able to summon swarms of attacking ravens and a small undead army, respectively. Swiftly swapping between magic and melee, he soon sent the concrete creature packing. While my demo was brief, it left no doubt that Death needn't worry about filling his fellow horseman's boots when *Darksiders II* lands like a cobblestone-smashing fist this summer.

PALE RIDER
Death's horse, Despair, will play a larger role than War's steed, Ruin, did in *Darksiders*.

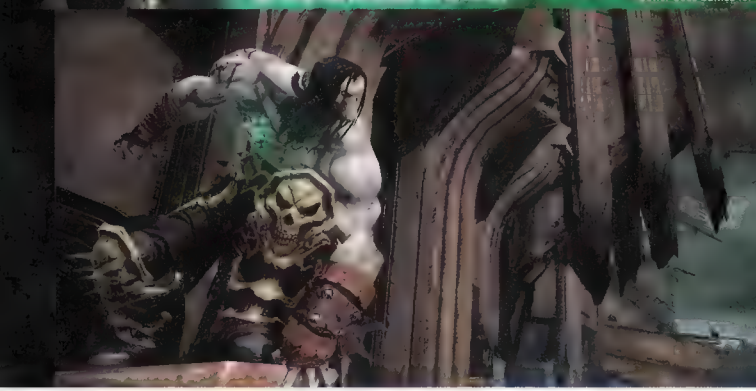
[illegible] HORSE
Based on those exposed ribs, Death better feed Despair some bad-guy guts, fast.

DEATH AND DESPAIR

Like *Darksiders*, the sequel will pair you with your horseman's trusty steed. Unlike the original, though—where you had to complete half the game before riding Ruin—*Darksiders II* introduces Death's horse, Despair, much earlier. Vigil's general manager [illegible] explains exactly when we'll get to saddle up: "One of the biggest things in the game is that you literally start on your horse." Giddy up!

▲ [illegible] hand

▲ This guy may look like a pussycat, but Vigil is promising bigger and better boss battles for *Darksiders II*.



DEATH'S DUDS

Darksiders II features a number of RPG-flavored elements, including collectible armor sets that boost specific powers and abilities. Equipping Necromancer, Slayer, and Wanderer armor, for example, provides buffs to magic, combat, and rogue-like skills, respectively. On top of enhancing Death's ability to do his job, the drenched-in-detail gear looks crazy cool—seriously, who's going to mess with a dude wearing giant skull knee pads?

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

DARKSIDERS II

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Vigil Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Summer 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Players who thought *Darksiders*'s protagonist, War, was wimpy.

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
There's no better way to prepare for the coming apocalypse than playing the original *Darksiders*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Darksiders II*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Duh...you're Death!
- Tons of new weapons, gear, and powers
- RPG-like progression

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Are fans of the original ready to embrace a new horseman?

A number of RPG elements, such as skill trees, make Death a more customizable killer.

AGILE ANTIHERO \\

Darksiders II's more expansive, vertical world demands a more agile hero. With this is mind, Vigil has made Death a far more acrobatic character than his predecessor—I even witnessed him running along walls in a fashion that would make the Prince of Persia proud.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS
You can cater to your specific play style by donning Death in skill-enhancing armor.

GAMEPLAY \\

While Death's story runs parallel to War's, Vigil won't comment on whether or not the two will cross paths.

Packed with optional side content, *Darksiders II* boasts a much larger world than its predecessor.

TOOLS OF DEATH-STRUCTION

On top of his signature scythes and magic abilities, Death has access to a variety of upgradable gear and weapons. During my demo, I watched him blast winged beasties from the sky with a hand-cannon and rearrange rib cages with an enormous bone hammer. Even cooler, he was able to harness the power of a vehicle-like device Vigil described as a "rideable construct."

Introducing the new Intel® 520 Series Solid-State Drive

Level Up to the 6.0 Gbps performance of Intel 520 Series Solid-State Drive

- Sequential reads of up to 550MB/s; sequential writes up to 520MB/s*
- Random reads up to 50,000 IOPs; random writes up to 60,000 IOPs**

Superior Data Protection Features

- Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) 256-bit encryption capabilities
- End to end data protection
- Backed by an industry-leading five-year warranty

intel®

* Performance measured using Iometer* with Queue Depth 32. Measurements are performed on 8 GB of logical block address (LBA) range on a full SSD
** Performance measured using Iometer* with Queue Depth 32

Copyright © 2012, Intel Corporation. All rights reserved. Intel, the Intel logo, Intel Core, and Intel Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries.

SORCERY

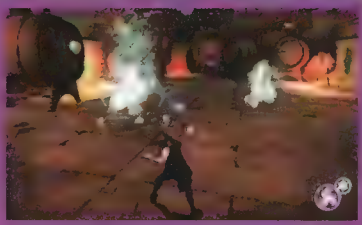
Turn the Move into a magic wand • Words: Matt Cabral

After an impressive showing at E3 2010, Sony's Move-enabled, fantasy-themed action adventure Sorcery did a disappearing act. Recently emerging from under its invisibility cloak, the title's now shaping up to be one of the more promising games to leverage the controller-free tech. As Finn, a young sorcerer's apprentice, wizard wannabes are tasked with wielding the motion-sensing peripheral as a spell-spitting magic wand.

Battling through vibrant fairytale settings, you'll use your mystical powers to take on a variety of enemies of the horned, fanged, and clawed variety, from menacing minions to towering titans, there's no shortage of ugly meanies to unleash your elemental arsenal on. Activated with a few simple motions, a variety of screen-clearing spells—including those based on ice, fire, and wind—can be conjured to show these baddies you mean business. A press of the Move button brings up a HUD along the bottom of the screen which displays the abilities currently picked from your bag of tricks; from there, a quick wrist flick or quarter-circle turn triggers the specific spells.

More powerful magic relies on monitoring a mana meter, but you also possess a bottomless supply of arcane bolts—just spam the Move trigger—which can be mixed and matched with other spells for maximum enemy-squashing effect. A defensive wall of fire, for example, becomes much more threatening when arcane bolts are blasted through it—instant fireballs! Another combat cocktail sees foes frozen with a shot of ice before their fragile forms are shattered with a flurry of arcane energy. Anyone who's played previous Move titles may shudder at the thought of pulling such sophisticated tricks from behind the finicky peripheral, but Sorcery seems to have tweaked and tuned the technology; unlike many of the hardware's early titles, it's complemented—not crippled—by the arm-waving trickery.

While my time with the wand focused on barbequing bad guys, sucking them into swirling vortexes, and putting them on ice, Sorcery also promises to pack in a number of non-combat features, such as potion-mixing, puzzle-solving, and character-building gameplay. You can look forward to showing Harry Potter how it's done when Sorcery casts its spell this spring.



IN CONTROL \\

Unlike many Move-powered titles, Sorcery doesn't clumsily cram all possible controls into a single peripheral. Instead, the protagonist's movement and shield-bash attacks are mapped to the navigation controller, while all magic-casting is handled with the wand. The result is an interactive experience that trades arm-flailing frustration for fluid mechanics.

Good Luck
Don't expect that flimsy bracelet to contain this screen-filling beast for long.

▼ Disarm enemies from a distance with magic, then finish the job with an armor-shattering shield bash.

CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF FIRENADOES \\

In addition to blending ice, fire, and wind magic with basic arcane attacks, you can combine these same powerful elemental spells to especially cool—and killer—effect. My favorite couples fire and wind, yielding a swirling vortex of flames or, as creative director Brian Upton calls it, a "Firenado."

▲ Bring the heat: Blast some arcane energy through that fire for a scorching attack.

THAT DARN CAT... \\

While not looking to add extra crispy bits to the business end of your arcane bolts, you'll find yourself exploring the environment and deciphering light puzzles. While non-combat tasks are meant to break up the action more than tax the mind, they do offer some moderate challenge. Thankfully, Finn's joined by a talking cat sidekick—yes, you heard right—who offers helpful hints. The mysterious feline friend, whose fluffy white tail serves as a navigational guide, also enjoys taunting Finn with snarky comments.

GAME DETAILS \\

RATING PENDING RP

ESRB

SORCERY

INFO
Publisher: SCEA
Developer: The Workshop
Platforms: PS3 (Move-compatible)

RELEASE DATE
Spring 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Fantasy fans who'd rather cast spells than swing swords

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

The Move-exclusive *Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest* will give you a taste of controller-free magic-casting.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

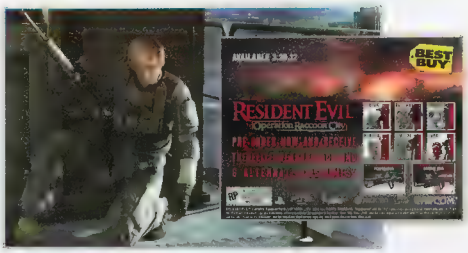
Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Sorcery*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Using the Move as a magic wand
- ❤ Cool spell combinations
- ❤ Great use of both Move peripherals

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Will those soured on previous Move games give the tech another chance?

Pre-Order Exclusives

Check out these special offers on upcoming games, available by pre-ordering now!



MAX PAYNE 3

Publisher: Rockstar • Developer: Rockstar Vancouver • Release Date: May 15, 2012

Pre-order the regular or special edition of *Max Payne 3* on PS3, Xbox 360, or PC and receive the first paid multiplayer downloadable pack at no extra charge.

RESIDENT EVIL: OPERATION RACCOON CITY

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Slant Six Games/ Capcom • Release Date: March 20, 2012

Pre-order the Best Buy Limited Edition of *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* for PS3 or Xbox 360 and get the Elite Weapons Pack with Perforator and Combat SMG and six alternate costumes, one for each controllable character.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 13

Publisher: EA • Developer: EA Tiburon • Release Date: March 27, 2012

Pre-order the standard or collector's edition of *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13* for PS3 or Xbox 360 and you'll receive a code to download the Emerald Dragon fantasy golf course, set in the shadow of Japan's iconic Mount Fuji.

MASS EFFECT 3

Publisher: EA • Developer: BioWare • Release Date: March 6, 2012

Pre-order *Mass Effect 3* on PS3, Xbox 360, or PC and receive a code to unlock the M55 Argus rifle. This high-powered weapon is excellent for close-range combat and its bursts of fire conserve ammunition during lengthy conflicts.

Trade in a game. Get a gift card. Get anything you want.

BEST BUY

BestBuy.com/GameTradeIn

PUSH START ON A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

BEST BUY | rewardzone
GAMERS CLUB
[UNLOCKED]

Take your gaming to another level with Reward Zone® Gamers Club Unlocked from Best Buy®. For the price of this magazine subscription, you gain access to exclusive offers, discounts, bonus points and a full year-long subscription to @Gamer.

ALL FOR ONLY $14.99 PER YEAR.

See a Best Buy Gaming Specialist in store to join Reward Zone Gamers Club Unlocked today.

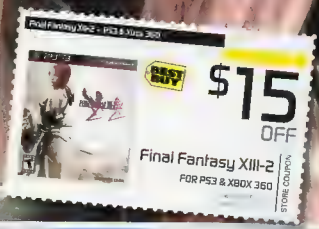
For Reward Zone Gamers Club Terms & Conditions, please visit MyRZ.com

BEST BUY | rewardzone
@GAMERS CLUB
[UNLOCKED]

EXCLUSIVE COUPONS FOR @GAMERS INSIDE!

$135
IN BEST BUY COUPONS

Score tremendous savings on these hit games and more:
Final Fantasy XIII-2
Batman: Arkham City
Mass Effect 2



PRESENTED BY:
NATE, 498 – BELLEVUE, WA
BEST BUY EMPLOYEE

The @GAMER crew declared *Batman: Arkham City* the best action game of 2011. Now it's your turn to check it out thanks to this $20 off coupon. But that's not all. *Final Fantasy* fans will no doubt jump at the chance to save $15 on *Final Fantasy XIII-2*. And with *Mass Effect 3* on the way, what better time to catch up with the series than by nabbing *Mass Effect 2* with this $15 off coupon?

And while you're in the store, don't forget to sign up for Best Buy's Reward Zone Gamers Club Unlocked so you never miss an issue.

$135 IN BEST BUY COUPONS

For PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 & more!

SEE PAGE 64

01 FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

It's been three years since the events of *Final Fantasy XIII*. Now, Lightning has gone missing and Snow is nowhere to be found, and Serah notices something is awry in the rebuilding world. Get ready for the newest installment of the *Final Fantasy* franchise, *Final Fantasy XIII-2*.

02 RAGE

Rage pits you against the odds in a desolate world in which you were selected for survival—just to face death at every turn. To redeem humanity, you must master a massive arsenal of exotic and powerful weapons.

03 BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

With Gotham's criminally insane, vile villains and insidious characters confined within the walls of Arkham City, Batman must fight to ensure his true identity remains hidden from the citizens he vows to protect.

04 MASS EFFECT 2

Once again Commander Shepard must step in, this time to repel the alien abductors, but he can't do it alone. Shepard calls on Cerberus, a ruthless organization dedicated to human survival at all costs.

05 BULLETSTORM

Bulletstorm places you in the role of Grayson Hunt, a former mercenary-turned-space pirate stranded on the deserted paradise planet of Stygia. Surrounded by hordes of mutants and flesh-eating gangs, you must fight to survive and claim revenge on the man who has marooned you here.

06 $10 OFF ANY PRE-OWNED GAME $19.99 OR ABOVE

Whether you're finally looking to jump on the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* bandwagon, or just looking to add to your library, don't miss out on $10 off any pre-owned game that's $19.99 or more.

07 AIRFLOW CONTROLLER

With the Airflow Controller for Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 you don't have to worry about moist hands inhibiting your gameplay during intense action sequences. Switch on the built-in, two-speed fan and keep those palms cool and comfortable while playing your favorite games.

08 TURTLE BEACH PX3

Designed for the PlayStation 3, Ear Force PX3 Programmable Wireless Gaming Headset may also enhance your Xbox or PC gaming experience. Thanks to Dynamic Chat Boost, the chat volume automatically increases as the game volume gets louder, so you'll never miss a word from your allies.

$135 IN COUPONS

For PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, & more!

Save on these games when you use your Reward Zone® program membership card • Special Reward Zone® program Gamers Club offer. Get in on more great offers by joining now. Go to MyRewardZone.com/GamersClub

Final Fantasy XIII-2 • PS3 & Xbox 360

BEST BUY

$15 OFF

Final Fantasy XIII-2

FOR PS3 & XBOX 360

VALID 03/04/12
THRU 04/07/12

STORE COUPON

Rage • PS3 & Xbox 360

BEST BUY

$15 OFF

Rage

FOR PS3 & XBOX 360

VALID 03/04/12
THRU 04/07/12

STORE COUPON

Batman: Arkham City • PS3 & Xbox 360

BEST BUY

$20 OFF

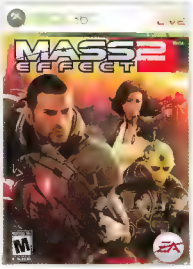
Batman: Arkham City

FOR PS3 & XBOX 360

VALID 03/04/12
THRU 04/07/12

STORE COUPON

Mass Effect 2 • PS3 & Xbox 360



BEST BUY

$15 OFF

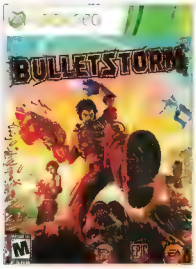
Mass Effect 2

FOR PS3 & XBOX 360

VALID 03/04/12
THRU 04/07/12

STORE COUPON

Bulletstorm • PS3 & Xbox 360



BEST BUY

$15 OFF

Bulletstorm

FOR PS3 & XBOX 360

VALID 03/04/12
THRU 04/07/12

STORE COUPON

Any pre-owned game $19.99 or above

PRE-OWNED

BEST BUY

$10 OFF

Any pre-owned game $19.99 or above

VALID 03/04/12
THRU 04/07/12

STORE COUPON

Airflow Controller • PS3 & Xbox 360

BEST BUY

$15 OFF

Airflow Controller

FOR PS3 & XBOX 360

VALID 03/04/12
THRU 04/07/12

STORE COUPON

Turtle Beach PX3

BEST BUY

$30 OFF

Turtle Beach PX3

VALID 03/04/12
THRU 04/07/12

STORE COUPON

$135 IN COUPONS

For PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, & more!

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 03/04/12 THRU 04/07/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4870416

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 03/04/12 THRU 04/07/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4870407

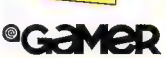
PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 03/04/12 THRU 04/07/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4870434



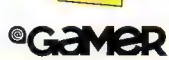
PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 03/04/12 THRU 04/07/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4870425



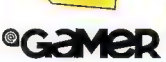
PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 03/04/12 THRU 04/07/12

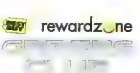
Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4870452





PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 03/04/12 THRU 04/07/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4870443

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 03/04/12 THRU 04/07/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4870259

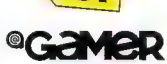
PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 03/04/12 THRU 04/07/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4870338



AIR FLO™

Play Hard. Stay Cool.

Forget the high-powered industrial fan. Air Flo™ controllers by POWER A have you covered. Patented Air Flo technology with built-in two-speed cooling fans and vents makes gaming more comfortable when the action heats up. Dual rumble motors and LED glow effects complete the package. How cool is that?

Available for
Xbox360® and PS3®

for PS3

See more at **PowerA.com**

LIKE US on Facebook

FOLLOW US on Twitter

POWER A™
Amplify Your Experience

©2012 Bensussen Deutsch & Associates, Inc. (BDA) BDA, POWER A, the POWER A logo and Amplify Your Experience are trademarks of Bensussen Deutsch & Associates, Inc. This product is manufactured under license from Microsoft Corporation. Microsoft, Kinect, Xbox, Xbox LIVE, Xbox 360, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies. PlayStation and PS3 are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment, Inc. This product is not designed, manufactured, sponsored or endorsed by Sony Computer Entertainment, Inc.

SPEC OPS:

WHERE AM I?
It seems that Dubai has fallen on some seriously tough times.

THE LINE

War is brutal, and 2K Games wants gamers to know it • Words: Wil O'Neal

In a gaming landscape that's dominated by military shooters, one may ask why 2K Games and Yager Development decided to jump into this already-crowded landscape. Games like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* and *Battlefield 3* already do a great job of providing gamers with enjoyable experiences, while attempts like THQ's *Homefront*, while promising, were a colossal disappointment. That's where *Spec Ops: The Line* comes in.

The team at Yager Development is quick to acknowledge that games like *CoD:MW3* are great at what they do. That said, the horde of run-and-gun military shooters fails in one way: Many of the most popular games don't delve into the more emotional aspects of warfare. To that end, *Spec Ops: The Line* will be a much darker experience than many gamers are used to getting.

Rife with moral ambiguity, *Spec Ops: The Line* follows a three-man Delta Recon Team headed up by Capt. Martin Walker. The squad is sent into a post-apocalyptic Dubai to discover the whereabouts of Col. John Konrad and the "Damned 33rd," a decorated battalion that was originally tasked with rescuing civilians after a series of catastrophic sandstorms ravaged the once-opulent city.

Spec Ops: The Line may remind you of *Apocalypse Now*, as Capt. Walker's Delta Team faces a situation that is much different than what they were sent in to handle. Heading into Dubai some six months after Col. Konrad and the Damned 33rd disappeared, Capt. Walker discovers that not only is the city not deserted, but it's also descended into a state of civil war, replete with innocent civilians in the mix to complicate things.

And this is where *Spec Ops*'s moral ambiguity comes into play. As you progress through the game, Capt. Walker will face moral dilemmas that impact the story's ultimate outcome. During my demos, I found myself in situations that could've gone either way. To that end, Denby Grace, the game's senior producer, assured me that *The Line* will often have multiple paths that lead to the same conclusion. In other words, you'll have the choice of completing missions either with stealth and restraint or with guns-a-blazing.

Adding an emotional component to a military game is something that few have accomplished, but when *Spec Ops: The Line* eventually ships this spring, I have a hunch that the team at Yager Development will pull it off.

01
02
03
THE PLAYER'S MOVEMENT IS SLOWED...
01 EPIC HEIGHTS
Dubai's verticality makes getting around the city more than a little tricky for you and your squadmates.
02 ROOFTOP
That penthouse was probably host to some lavish parties—but those days are long gone.
03 SLOW GOING
The frequent sandstorms will often slow your progress to a crawl and make combat more difficult.

When the sand-storms hit, you'll have to pay special attention to flying debris in addition to enemy combatants.

OUR INTREPID LEADER

Spec Ops: The Line places you in the role of Capt. Martin Walker. The leader of the small, three-man Delta Recon Team, it is up to you to lead the squad in its attempt to locate Col. John Konrad, leader of the so-called Damned 33rd; discover what exactly has gone down in Dubai; and try to save as many people as possible. Spec Ops: The Line, however, has numerous twists and turns it loves to throw in your face. Do you kill four people now to save dozens more later? Moral dilemmas like this follow Capt. Walker all over Dubai.

CAPT. MARTIN WALKER
Leadership is tough and Capt. Walker knows this. He'll often have to make tough decisions.

DUST TO DUST

Where nighttime plays an important role in other military shooters—requiring you to take your time in situations where visibility is low—dust and sand play a similar role in Spec Ops. In the scene depicted here, a fast-moving sandstorm interrupts a battle and complicates matters. Your movement is slowed to a near crawl, and visibility is similarly diminished. Enemy combatants appear, seemingly out of nowhere, and lining up bad guys with your weapon becomes more difficult. Of course, if you "play" the environment, you can use the sand to your advantage.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOOD MISSIONS GO BAD?

SQUADMATES
Capt. Walker is an elite member of a Delta Recon Team. Thankfully, his squadmates are also elite, and will behave as such.

Spec Ops: The Line aims to make you think about the morality of what you're doing. While Col. Konrad and the Damned 33rd were originally sent to Dubai on a humanitarian mission, things went bad fast. As the sandstorms that originally ravaged the city continue, Dubai is plunged into a state of chaos and allegiances are constantly called into question. Similar to Col. Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, Col. Konrad has effectively gone rogue—which changes your mission focus.

As Capt. Walker and his Delta Team unravel the mystery of Col. Konrad and the Damned 33rd, the story gets sticky, with CIA operatives in the mix along with other rogue American soldiers. During my demo, Capt. Walker was forced to fight and kill other American soldiers. If Capt. Walker was sent in to protect civilians, what should he do when he comes across American soldiers brutalizing the civilians? In one scene, Capt. Walker, Lt. Adams, and Sgt. Lugo come across American soldiers executing locals. While Capt. Walker is torn about what to do—should he stay on-mission and pursue Col. Konrad or go off-mission and rescue the civilians—his decision isn't made any easier by his also-conflicted squadmates.

The younger Sgt. Lugo is horrified at what he's seeing and thinks Delta Team should intervene on behalf of the civilians, while Lt. Adams wants to stick to the mission.

In another scenario, Capt. Walker and the team come across two people about to be hanged, an American soldier and a civilian. Snipers above have all five of you in their sights and you're prompted to make a decision. You can shoot the civilian and spare the solider...or vice versa. (*Spec Ops: The Line* details why both men are condemned.) Or perhaps you could try to save both by targeting the snipers. How you handle the dilemma determines how your squadmates feel about you.

TURNABOUT IS EXPECTED
Enemies will used fixed positions against you—but you can take them over and use the machine gun against them.

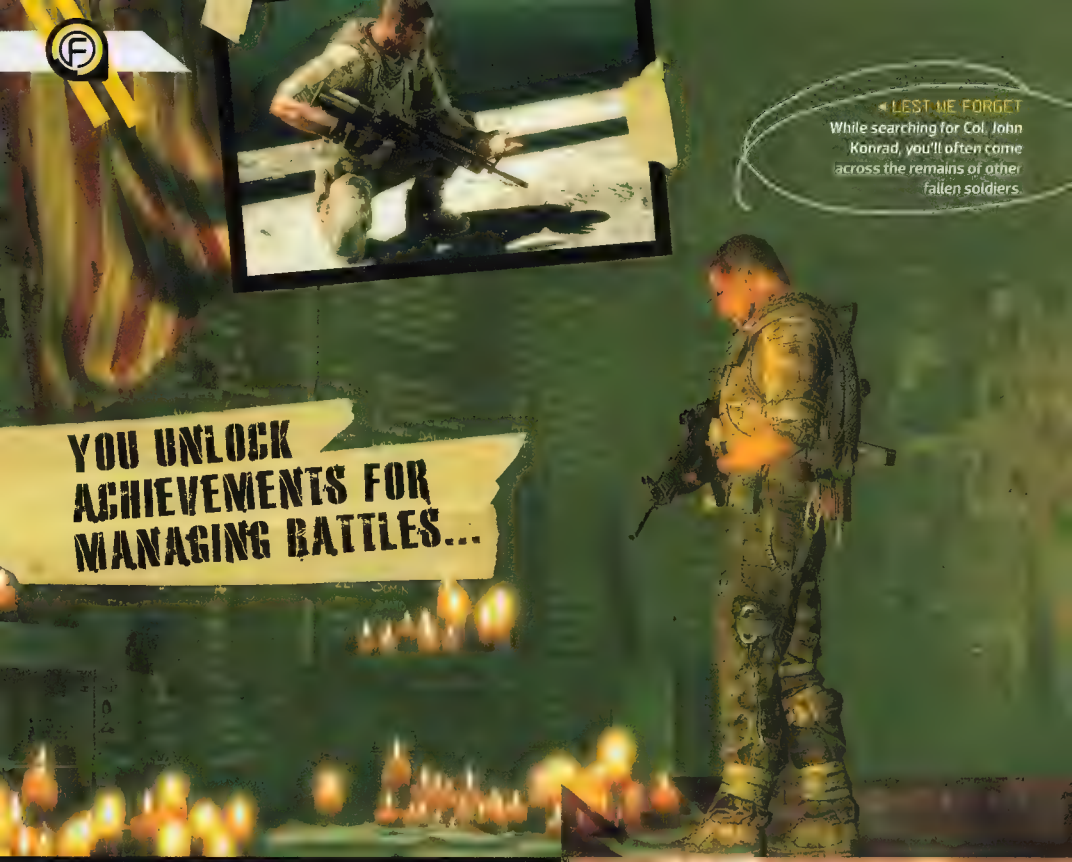
01 SCENERY
In a devastated Dubai, indoors and outdoors are similar—especially if you shoot out the windows.

02 DO I?
Spec Ops is all about portraying the horrors of warfare. You may need to eliminate an enemy to get intel and supplies.

03 DON'T I?
Conversely, if you wipe out a Joe, you may miss out on the valuable info he'd tell you if spared.

WHO'S RUNNING THIS SHOW?

While Capt. Walker tries to make heads or tails of what is going on in Dubai, throughout the game he'll make contact with various individuals of questionable allegiance. Playing on the game's commitment to moral ambiguity, NPCs that, at one stage, might offer assistance, may later betray you. So, yeah, make your enemies dead, and your friends...well, they're probably your enemies, too.



LEST WE FORGET
While searching for Col. John Konrad, you'll often come across the remains of other fallen soldiers.

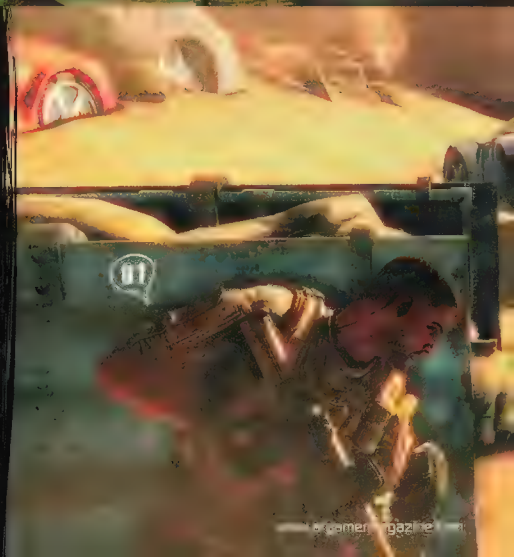
YOU UNLOCK ACHIEVEMENTS FOR MANAGING BATTLES...

TEAMPLAY IS INTEGRAL TO YOUR SUCCESS IN SPEC OPS

Several times during gameplay I fell back on my typical, run-and-gun, go-it-alone strategy. While this can be done—and for the most part it's how you're supposed to play in many shooters—it's not the best plan with *Spec Ops: The Line*. As a squad-based shooter, not only can you unlock achievements for successfully managing battles, but in some instances, it's also nearly impossible to succeed without having your squad-mates execute specific actions throughout the gunfight.

Consider, for instance, the battle to the right. While it may feel natural to just jump out there and start spraying enemy combatants, your best bet is to have Lt. Alphonso Adams (voiced by Christopher "Kid" Reid from the hip-hop group Kid 'n' Play) target the enemy up on the platform, while you take out the enemy trying to flank Lt. Adams.

Additionally, while Sgt. John Lugo (and his trusty sniper rifle) are out of the picture, that doesn't mean that he's out of the action. If you need his assistance, have him target the combatant flanking Lt. Adams.



HEALING
The game notifies you when your squadmates are in need of medical attention.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

You'll spend most of the game alongside your squadmates Lt. Alphonso Adams and Sgt. John Lugo. And while some of the moral decisions that you make throughout the campaign (such as whether to kill innocent civilians and other American servicemen) will have Lugo and Adams alternately questioning your actions or goading you on, the fact remains that you're always there for each other.

01 TAKE COVER
...ith most third-person ...ooters, cover plays a ...ge part in *Spec Ops*.

02 SWAP
...uring gameplay, you'll be prompted to "swap" cover locations.

03 TARGET
When the going gets tough, order your squadmates to target certain enemies.

HANDS-ON

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

INFO
Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Yager Development
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
April 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBD

GENRE
Third-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Shooter fans who prefer a dark, third-person perspectvie

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you haven't played *Operation Flashpoint: Red River*, run out and grab a copy.

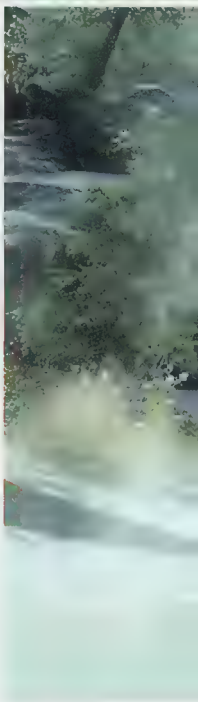
WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Spec Ops: The Line*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Having it take place in Dubai offers some unique environments
- ❤ The game's dark, morally ambiguous story is a welcome departure

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The third-person perspective doesn't appeal to everyone
- ✖ AI could use some fine-tuning

2011 GAME OF THE YEAR AWARDS



With 2011 in the rear-view mirror, we look back at the year that was and crown our favorites

• Words: Chuck Osborn, Andy Eddy, and William O'Neal

Whenever we begin a new year we can't help but get excited about all of the upcoming games. While we are privy to a lot of early information, the fact remains that until we get our hands on the games and put 'em through their paces, we honestly don't know which ones are gonna live up to our expectations and which ones are gonna fall by the marketing hype wayside.

Whether it's the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* versus *Battlefield 3* battle that... well...never really turned out to be much of battle after all, the complete and utter dominance of an epic like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, or the overwhelming success of a seemingly smaller outing like *Portal 2*, it's always fun to look back at the previous year.

With that in mind, we hunkered down in the @GAMER salt mines, effectively sequestering ourselves from all outside influences, grabbed 2011's 10 issues of @GAMER, broke out the fine-toothed combs, and laboriously pored over every issue, page-by-page, all in an attempt to settle the perennial argument: What was the best game of the year?

01 DRAGONBORN
You play as a hero born with the power of The Voice, prophesied to save the land of Tamriel from dragons.

02 BEASTLY
Dragons are terrorizing the land in sudden attacks. It's a good thing you gain their power by killing them.

ELDER SCROLLS: SKYRIM

BEST GAME OF THE YEAR AND BEST RPG

Publisher: Bethesda • Developer: Bethesda • ESRB: M

In a year that saw Batman infiltrate Arkham City, hard-nosed detectives cruise the streets of 1940s Los Angeles, and a maniacal Portal gun-induced gauntlet of puzzles from Valve, one game surpassed them all. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* wowed us with its size, detailed world, and sandbox-style gameplay that can keep you playing indefinitely.

It should be no surprise then that this magnificent adventure is also our pick for the year's Best RPG. More productivity was lost to endless hours of slaying dragons and exploring the land of Skyrim than to any other game released in 2011 \\

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3

BEST SHOOTER AND BEST MULTIPLAYER

Publisher: Activision | Developer: Infinity Ward | ESRB: M

2011 looked like it was gonna be a battle between Battlefield 3 and Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3. It wasn't. CoD: MW3 not only bested its main competitor, but ended up being the best-selling videogame ever.

CoD: MW3 picks up the single-player campaign where its predecessor left off. But it's the multiplayer that really takes the cake, boasting some unique new gameplay types and a massive multiplayer user base. \\

L.A. NOIRE

BEST ADVENTURE GAME AND BEST NARRATIVE

Publisher: Rockstar | Developer: Team Bondi | ESRB: M

Set in the golden age of Hollywood, L.A. Noire puts you in the role of new LAPD officer Cole Phelps, a no-nonsense WWII vet who works his way up through the ranks from patrolman to detective to arson investigator. The game broke new ground in how you interact with—and interpret the voices and mannerisms of—the suspects you question, making this one of the most realistic police procedurals ever attempted. The atmosphere, writing, and believable performances combine to propel you into L.A. circa 1947. Sadly, Team Bondi is gone, which makes the possibility of a sequel's final mystery.

NBA 2012

Publisher: 2K | Developer: 2K Sports | ESRB: E

\\

BEST ACTION GAME

01 Bad guys like Bane sometimes work alongside Batman...but I wouldn't turn your back on them for long.

02 By using combos and blocking incoming attacks, Batman can gracefully take out an entire room of thugs by himself.

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

BEST ACTION GAME

Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment • Developer: Rocksteady Studios • ESRB: T

There was no sophomore slump when it came to Rocksteady's sequel to 2009's Batman: Arkham Asylum. As the title suggests, everything about Arkham City is bigger, bolder, and more brutal, with a world several times the size of the original and packing almost every major Bat villain into one game. Deceptively simple fight controls and an array of upgradeable gadgets allow this Batman to show off his combat skills with ballet-like precision.

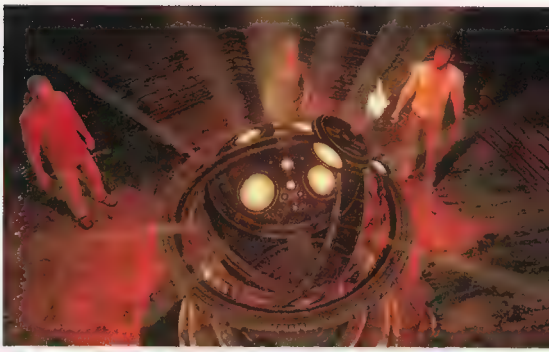
And then there's Catwoman. Though only playable for about 10% of the main storyline, her inclusion smacks of sheer genius. Dangerous yet witty, she's just the extra dash of feline femininity the franchise needed. \\

UNCHARTED 3: DRAKE'S DECEPTION

BEST PLAYSTATION 3 GAME

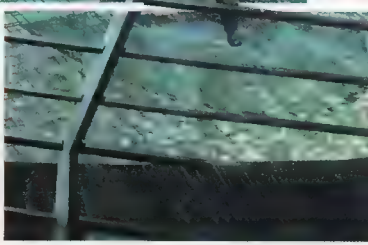
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment • Developer: Naughty Dog • ESRB: T

When it comes to action-packed, cinematic experiences, no other PS3 game released in 2011 can match *Uncharted 3*. Following up a couple years after the events of its mind-blowing predecessor, the game follows Nathan Drake on a hunt for the legendary lost city, the Iram of the Pillars. But the real stars of the show are the mind-blowing setpiece sequences that task Drake (and you) with escaping from a capsized ship as it's sinking and fighting through a damaged plane before it crashes \\



01 ACTION
Nathan Drake has some new fighting moves in *Uncharted 3*, letting him use objects in the environment to smack down enemies.

02 ROMANCE
Nate's relationship with Elena Fisher after *Uncharted 2* is explored in sharply acted, well-written cut-scenes.



LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

BEST Wii GAME

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Nintendo EAD
ESRB: E10+

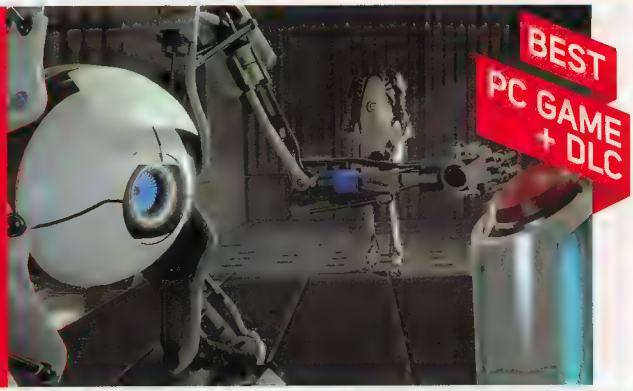
Like death and taxes, you can be sure there will be new Zelda games...but the latter are much more enjoyable than the first two. Skyward Sword follows the trend, taking full advantage of the Wii MotionPlus to turn your gestures into deft onscreen swordplay by Link—and matching the speed and angle at which you're moving the Wii Remote. The game doesn't let fans down in the slightest, and drew in more players to don the green outfit. \\

PORTAL 2

BEST PC GAME AND DLC

Publisher: Valve | Developer: Valve | ESRB: E10+

While also available on XBox 360 and PS3, the best Portal 2 experience is on the PC, when lining up split-second shots with your portal gun is so much easier using a mouse and keyboard. A contender for our Game of the Year, Portal 2 not only brought a brilliantly mind-bending assortment of single-player puzzles, it also introduced a lengthy co-op campaign—made even better with a free major expansion, called Peer Review. Valve knows how to keep its fans happy! \\



GEARS OF WAR 3

Publisher: Microsoft | Developer: Epic Games | ESRB: M

\\

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

BEST MMO

Publisher: EA | Developer: BioWare | ESRB: T

BioWare plus Star Wars has always been a winning combination. The Old Republic, however, was a heady experiment that took the developer to a new frontier: the massively multiplayer game. Officially recognized by Guinness World Records as the "largest entertainment voice over project ever" with over 200,000 lines of recorded dialogue, the gamble seems to have paid off. (See our review on p.60.) SWTOR has redefined MMOs for a new generation and given solo players a reason to play in this massive online universe. \\

SONY PLAYSTATION BUNDLE

BEST GEAR

Manufacturer: Sony

We know what you're thinking. A 3D display? Really? But trust us on this one. At around $299 at Best Buy, the Sony Playstation 3D Bundle really is a great way to get your feet wet with the whole 3D gaming thing. While game developers are still working out the kinks, many games (Batman: Arkham City and Crysis 2 come to mind) do a great job of supporting 3D, and we can only assume that more games will include the feature going forward. \\

MORE

Publisher: Sega Developer: Creative Assembly ESRB: T

\\

Publisher: Capcom Developer: Capcom ESRB: T

\\

Publisher: Microsoft Developer: Turn 10 Studios ESRB: E

\\

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Nintendo EAD ESRB: E

\\

Because Jess plays video games the ESRB (that's the Entertainment Software Rating Board) understands that some games aren't right for everyone.
Just like movies, every game has a rating. And those ratings come from the ESRB.
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

www.ESRB.org

© 2006 ESRB. All rights reserved.

GAMING PC BUILD-IT

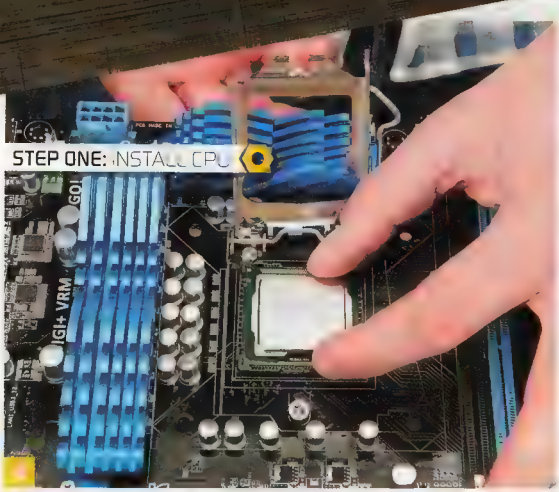
PC gaming is the best gaming, and hand-built PCs are the best PCs.

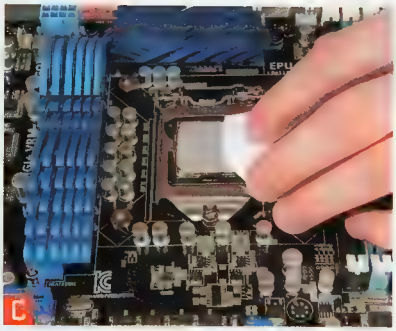
What's better than having an awesome gaming PC? Having one you put together yourself. Whether you're a PC gaming veteran or a recent immigrant from Consolevania, I've got the parts and the step-by-step instructions so you can turn a pile of components into a high-powered, upgrade-ready PC that can crush any game you play for years to come—

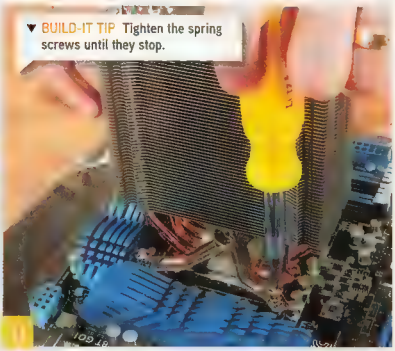
The configuration shown here I picked myself. It'll all well together, but it's just nder-kill for you, change it up! That's what building your own

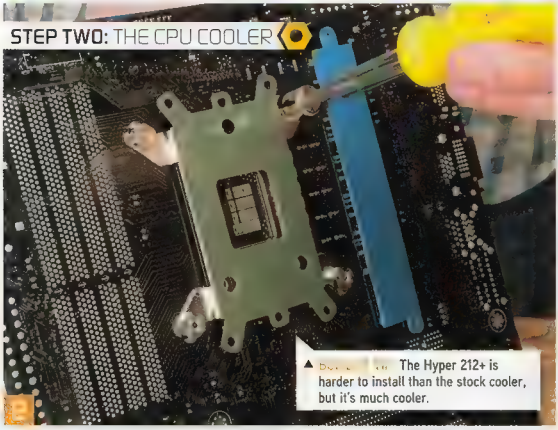
WHAT YOU'LL NEED \\

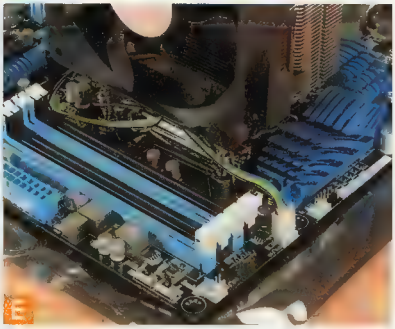
- **CASE:** Corsair Carbide 500R
- **POWER SUPPLY:** Corsair HX750
- **CPU:** Intel Core i7-2500K
- **MOTHERBOARD:** Asus P8Z68V/Gen-3
- **COOLER:** Cooler Master Hyper 212+
- **RAM:** 16GB Corsair Vengeance DDR3/1600
- **GPU:** EVGA GeForce GTX 570 HD
- **SSD:** Samsung 830 Series 256GB *(optional)*
- **HDD:** Seagate Barracuda 3TB
- **OPTICAL:** Plextor PX-890SA
- **HEADPHONES:** Corsair Vengeance 1500
- **MOUSE:** Cyborg R.A.T. 9
- **KEYBOARD:** Razer BlackWidow Ultimate
- **OS:** Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit
- **MONITOR:** Acer HN274H
- A Phillips-head screwdriver











**A INSTALLING CPU ** It's a lot easier to install the CPU, cooler, and RAM before you even put the motherboard into your case. Lift the arm that's holding the CPU socket gate closed. Remove the plastic socket protector, then gently lower the Intel Core i5-2500K CPU into the socket, aligning the gold triangle on one corner with the triangle in the corner of the CPU socket. Lower the gate arm to lock the socket gate back into place.

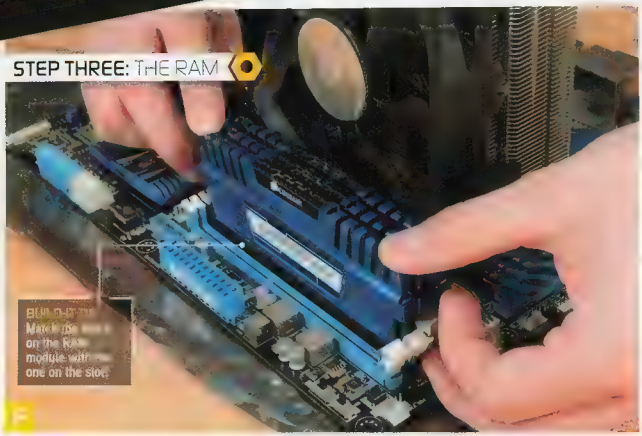
**B TIGHTENING BACKPLATE ** Align the CPU cooler backplate with the holes around the CPU socket, and push the four mounting posts through the front of the motherboard, then secure them in back with the four nuts—the Hyper 212+ comes with a little screwdriver adapter to make sure the hex nuts are fully tightened.

**C INSTALLING THERMAL PASTE ** Take the little tube of thermal paste that came with the cooler and make an X with thermal paste on the CPU, then use your finger or the edge of a business card to spread it into a thin layer covering the whole CPU. This eliminates gaps between the CPU and the cooler and transfers heat more efficiently.

**D TIGHTENING COOLER BRACKET ** Put the CPU retention bracket through the bottom of the CPU cooler and open the legs into an X shape, being sure to follow the directions that come with the cooler. Tighten the spring-screws into the mounting posts in an X pattern, like mounting a wheel on a car.

**E CONNECTING CPU_FAN HEADER ** Clip the CPU fan onto the front of the cooler (the side closest to the RAM slots), then attach the four-pin fan lead into the motherboard header marked CPU_FAN. This will allow the motherboard to control the fan speed based on temperature.

STEP THREE: THE RAM



**THE RAM ** This is the last step before you put the motherboard into the case. Open the clasps on each end of the RAM slots and install each stick of RAM one at a time. Make sure the RAM is oriented correctly, then push down firmly on both ends of the RAM module until the white clasps click into their locked position around the module. Repeat for the other three modules.

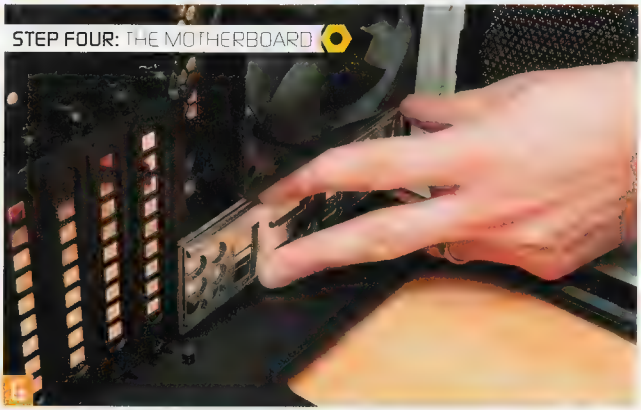
**INSTALLING I/O SHIELD ** Take the I/O shield from the motherboard box and push it into place in the case's rear panel from inside, making sure it clicks into place.

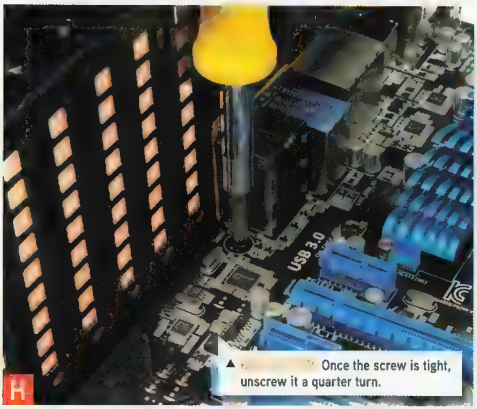
**PLACING MOTHERBOARD SCREWS ** Put the motherboard into the case, making sure its I/O ports align with the I/O shield you just installed and the mounting holes align with the standoffs. Use the motherboard screws indicated in the case user manual to secure the motherboard into the standoffs.

**INSTALLING GRAPHICS CARD ** Remove the second and third PCIe slot covers. Align the graphics card's PCIe connector with the topmost PCI x16 slot (the first long one) and press the card straight down into the slot. Secure it with the two thumbscrews from the expansion slot covers.

MAKE SURE THE RAM IS ORIENTED CORRECTLY, THEN PUSH DOWN FIRMLY...

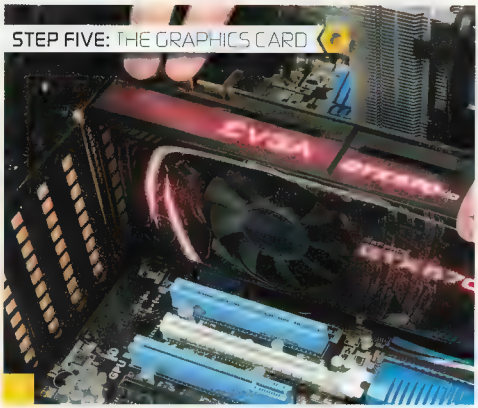
STEP FOUR: THE MOTHERBOARD





▲ Once the screw is tight, unscrew it a quarter turn.

STEP FIVE: THE GRAPHICS CARD



**J INSTALLING OPTICAL DRIVE ** Turn the case upright. Remove the entire front panel by pulling it forward from the bottom. Remove the the top optical drive bezel and replace the front panel. Slide the DVD drive into the slot. The toolless mechanism will engage automatically when the drive is in position, but you can use screws for added security.

**K INSTALLING (OPTIONAL) SSD ** Use the small 2.5-inch drive mounting screws to secure the Samsung 830 Series SSD to one of the 500R's drive trays, as shown.

**L MOUNTING HDD ** For the mechanical drive, all you have to do is flex the drive tray slightly until the built-in pegs snap into the mounting holes on the side of the drive. Slot the drive tray back into the system. You'll come back to these drives when it's time to connect power and data cables.

STEP SIX: THE DRIVES

J

K

**M INSTALLING PSU ** Install the Corsair HX750 power supply into the mount at the bottom of the chassis with the four screws designated in the case instruction manual. Make sure the power supply's intake fan is mounted against the bottom of the case.

**N ROUTING PSU CABLES BEHIND MOTHERBOARD TRAY ** Pull the 24-pin and 8-pin ATX power supply cables through the rubber-grommeted hole at the bottom of the motherboard tray, closest to the power supply. Route them behind the motherboard tray to the cable-routing cutout closest to their respective ports—the 24 pin goes on the right edge of the motherboard, north of center. Plug the 24-pin connector into the relevant port on the motherboard. You can't miss it.

L

STEP SEVEN: THE POWER SUPPLY

M

N

**CONNECTING 8-PIN ** Pull the eight-pin ATX power connector through the cable-routing hole near the top left of the motherboard. Push it firmly into the port on the motherboard until you hear a click. Many people forget this step and wonder why their machines don't boot.

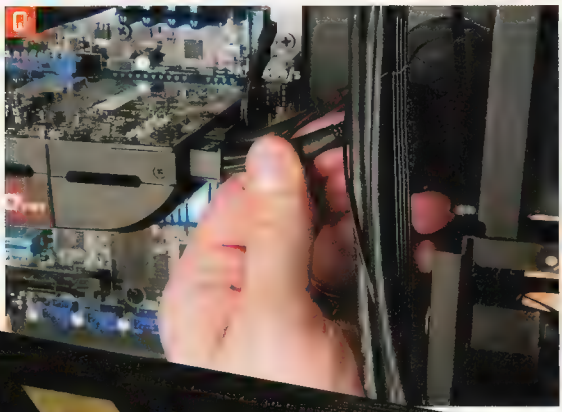
**CONNECTING REMAINING POWER CABLES ** The Corsair HX750 is a modular power supply, so don't forget to connect the cables you'll need. Find two six-pin PCIe power connectors, one SATA power connector strip, and one four-pin Molex connector strip. Attach them to the color-coded plugs on the power supply—blue connectors for the PCIe power connectors, and black for the SATA and four-pin connectors.

**POWERING THE GRAPHICS CARD ** Run the PCIe cables behind the motherboard tray, out one of the connectors on the side, and into the two six-pin connectors on the graphics card.

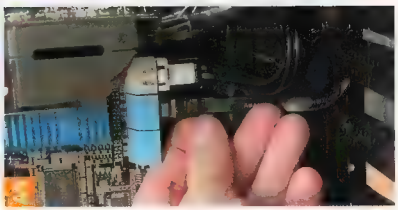
**POWERING THE DRIVES ** Run the SATA power cables behind the motherboard up to the optical drive and connect it. Run another to the hard drive and solid-state drive in their bays at the bottom of the case.

**GET YOUR DATA ON ** Connect SATA data cables to all three drives and plug the other ends into the SATA ports at the bottom right of the motherboard. Plug the SSD and hard drive SATA cables into the gray ports and the SATA cable from the DVD drive into the blue ports.

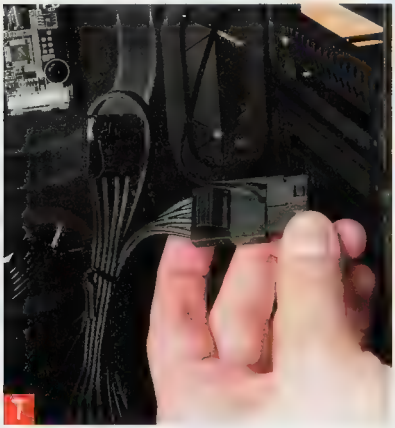
STEP EIGHT: THE REST OF THE CABLES

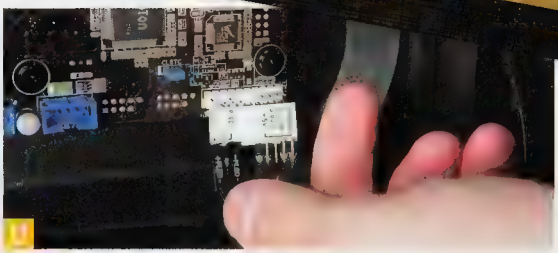


▼ BUILD-IT TIP Don't forget the power cables too!



GET YOUR GAME ON, YOU PC BUILDER, YOU.





**CONNECTING THE FAN CABLES ** Make sure the rear fan's three-pin power cable is plugged into a header on the motherboard, and the two front fan cables are plugged into the Y-splitter with a four-pin Molex power connector on the end. Plug that four-pin connector into the other power cable you've connected to the power supply (pictured).

**FRONT-PANEL CONNECTORS ** Attach the front-panel USB 3.0 header to its port just right of the RAM slots. Plug the HD_Audio header in at the bottom left of the motherboard, as shown in the motherboard manual. The header that says 1394 is for the FireWire port, which our motherboard doesn't have. You can curl that up and stow it above the optical drive. Plug the front-panel connectors (power, reset, LED, etc.) into the little gray dongle Asus provides for the purpose, then connect that to the motherboard (pictured).

THE FINISHED PRODUCT \\

**SHOW ME ** Now the machine should be ready to turn on. You're not quite done, of course; you still have to plug in the monitor, keyboard, mouse, and headphones, and of course install Windows and the motherboard drivers. Fortunately, that stuff's all pretty easy. If you sprung for the SSD, install Windows to that drive. If you didn't, and you got a 3TB drive, you'll have to press Delete during your first boot-up. That'll bring you to the BIOS; make sure the first boot device is set to UEFI: Plextor optical drive. The UEFI mode is important; without it, the Windows install disc won't be able to set up a bootable Windows partition using the whole 3TB drive. Once Windows is installed, insert the motherboard driver DVD; you can use Asus InstALL to speed up the process. Then it's a quick jaunt to nvidia.com to download the latest graphics drivers, and you're all set. Get your game on, you champion PC builder, you!

PS VITA

A portable powerhouse with cool features...but is it enough? • Words: @GAMER staff and Ryan Scott

Sony added to its handheld line recently with the PlayStation Vita, and it's a looker with hot, cutting-edge components. Super-sharp visuals play smoothly on the 5" OLED screen, and it responds whip-quick to screen touches. A rear touchpad adds different features to games (though it also comes with a bit of a learning curve).

Vita also comes with some unique capabilities, including cross-platform interaction: Some titles share game saves between Vita and PS3, while others provide actual multiplayer between platforms. Built-in cameras can take pictures, sure, but some game-makers are taking that further, either to customize a game's look or to actually enhance gameplay.

And the social aspects are being built up as well. It seems a game system without connectivity to Twitter and Facebook is missing out; Vita offers that and more. The cool Near app enables your Vita to find other Vitas in your vicinity for gameplay or socializing.

On the downside, some have complained that the rear touchpad leaves just fingertip-grips to hold the system—and taking a hand off to use the front touch screen increases the risk of a drop much more.

Perhaps the biggest question is whether there's much interest in the Vita, which doesn't just compete with handheld game systems, but also against growing mobile-phone ubiquity. You may want one, but these days you have to consider if you need one.

PS VITA

- ❤ Sony engineers painted it "cool" and "powerful"
- ❤ Two analog sticks rock
- ❤ Touch screens full of win

- ✖ You can't hold it like a PSP
- ✖ Custom memory is pricey
- ✖ How many mobile devices will you carry around?

4

The dual touchscreens make it easier to pull off complex moves.

FIFA SOCCER

Publisher: EA Sports • Developer: EA Sports •
Release Date: February 15, 2012

The FIFA titles have always enjoyed rather seamless portable translations. Of course, most other portables aren't like the PS Vita, with its dual touch-screen (front and back) functionality. If you're a fan of the FIFA games, you'll no doubt enjoy it on the Vita. The rear touch screen is used for targeting the net (which is awesome and actually works) and you can use the front touch screen for passing, though that takes more to get used to. EA has also made this powerful portable FIFA look great, and fans should love it.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

It's simple: Either get into the game's beat or the game beats you.

LUMINES ELECTRONIC SYMPHONY

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Q Entertainment •
Release Date: February 15, 2012

This sequel to the PSP's breakout launch title ought to replicate that success: *Lumines Electronic Symphony* is the finest falling-pieces puzzler since *Tetris*, with an energized techno/lounge soundtrack that just might make fans forget the Gwen Stefani nonsense that *Lumines II* forced on them. Equal parts challenging and therapeutic, once you get into a groove, you could spend well over an hour on a single game (that is, if the increasingly frantic theme shifts don't steal your mojo). With a puzzle game of this caliber, it's time well-spent.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

TOUCH MY KATAMARI

Publisher: Namco Bandai • Developer: Namco Bandai •
Release Date: February 22, 2012

If you've played *Katamari* before, the Vita version gets classic junk-rolling enjoyment here with a few nice touches: It lets you pilot the Prince with the comfy dual-stick controls you're familiar with, but Namco Bandai has also enabled touch-screen control—the choice is yours. Even better, though, is the ability to morph the garbage ball (with the rear touchpad) to make it a long, floor-clearing roller or a tall, thin disc that fits tight spaces. The King's chatter heavily s-l-o-w-s between-level transitions, but otherwise it's a great time.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

"He's too colorful to be a zombie, so I'd better start moving faster."

ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3

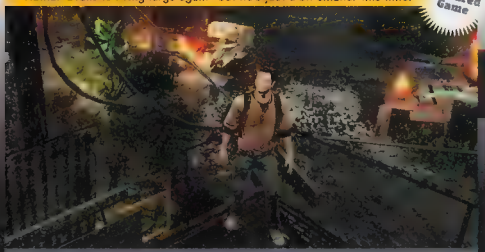
Publisher: Capcom Developer: Capcom/Eighting •
Release Date: February 15, 2012

Well-miniaturized fighting games are rarities, but *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* loses none of its console counterpart's fidelity. Yet, fighters are odd fits on handhelds, as the long-haul audience tends to be the let's-sit-down-and-pummel-each-other type. Portable fighters might get more mileage out of single-player content, yet UMvC3 skimps in that regard. But if you want to beat up on friends (locally or online) as Spider-Man or Phoenix Wright...well, at least the touch-screen controls get the big combos flying easily.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

Nathan Drake is living large again—but he's just a bit smaller this time.

Featured Game



UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS

Publisher: SCEA Developer: SCEE Bend
Release Date: February 15, 2012

The Uncharted series has mastered third-party cinematic flow and engrossing action. The Vita version adds some nice use of the touch screen—such as being able to "paint" a path you want Drake to follow, which mostly works well and doesn't keep your fingers in the way of the visual presentation. However, there are some aspects sacrificed in the move to a smaller screen. Such as fewer movie-like camera "shots" in key action scenes, which makes what should be thrilling moments a little less so. Still, it's the must-have Vita game.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

ARMY CORPS OF HELL

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Enterphere
Release Date: February 22, 2012

Here's one out of left field from Square Enix: The deposed King of Hell (yes, that's his given title) directs hordes of slavering goblin minions to battle creepy monsters for him (against a bizarre J-rock soundtrack, no less) as he seeks to reclaim his throne. It's an amusing premise...but this feels like a rushed tech demo.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

ASPHALT INJECTION

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Gameloft
Release Date: February 15, 2012

The problem with many portable launches is that the first titles are often ports of games that were uninspired to begin with. Such is the case with Asphalt Injection. It's good enough as a racer, but the problem is that it's somewhat boring. If you're looking for a fun arcade-like racing game, we'd suggest checking out *Wipeout 2048* first.

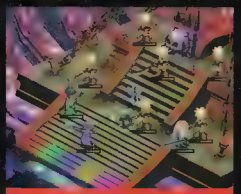
OVERALL RATING: 2.5

BLAZBLUE: CONTINUUM SHIFT EXTEND

Publisher: Aksys
Developer: Arc System Works
Release Date: February 22, 2012

This *BlazBlue* sequel looks as dazzling as its console counterparts, and includes simplified controls to ease the transition. As a 2D fighter for the truly mechanics-obsessed, *BlazBlue* is an odd choice for a portable port, but the single-player Story Mode's bizarre narrative might appeal to the hardcore.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5



DISGAEA 3: ABSENCE OF DETENTION

Publisher: NIS America
Developer: NIS
Release Date: April 17, 2012

For anyone who loves *Tactics Ogre* or *Final Fantasy Tactics*—or, well, *Disgaea*—here's a remake of a perfectly adequate (if antiquated) 2008 tactical RPG. It's dense—you won't learn it fast—but if you're a strategy wonk who doesn't mind inscrutable anime-powered plots, you may have a new favorite.

OVERALL RATING: 3.25

DUNGEON HUNTER ALLIANCE

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Gameloft
Release Date: February 15, 2012

Dungeon Hunter Alliance is a port of a sequel to an isometric iPhone dungeon-crawler, set in a generic fantasy world...which pretty much says it all. It's mindless and sparse, with a basic leveling system and lots of bad guys to smack around. The consistent slowdown is an embarrassment for such a modest game; try it if you must.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

DYNASTY WARRIORS NEXT

Publisher: Tecmo Koei
Developer: Omega Force
Release Date: February 22, 2012

The *Dynasty Warriors* games have a reputation for big battles that you lead—with the power to slay hundreds of foes in grand swordplay. While the graphics are sharp on the Vita, you'll face myriad strange situations where enemies unnervingly pop up in clusters...and, frankly, it's all too monotonous. Unless you're a *DW* nut, find the fun elsewhere.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

F1 2011

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Release Date: February 22, 2012

After we got our hands on it last year, we were taken in by the sheer intensity that F1 2011 offered in its racing, and we love the PS Vita version for the same reasons. When we first saw it months ago, we had our doubts, but the Codemasters team pulled together an awesome and challenging (though pared-down) port of the version that graced our consoles.

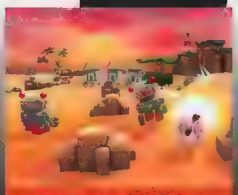
OVERALL RATING: 4.0

HOT SHOTS GOLF: WORLD INVITATIONAL

Publisher: SCEA
Developer: Clap Hanz
Release Date: February 15, 2012

The long-running series continues on the Vita, which adds touch-screen controls for shot info and camera perspective. The game's shot system has also been improved. And interactivity is at a premium, with the potential for up to 30 people on a hole at the same time, as well as challenges.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25



LITTLE DEVIANTS

Publisher: SCEA
Developer: Bigbig Studios
Release Date: February 15, 2012

Every game platform should have some titles that showcase its best features, and this is one of the Vita's. You need to roll the body character toward pick-ups and away from hazards. But the key here is that your control is indirect. You use the rear touch screen to deform the terrain and tilt the Vita to get the desired results. It's simple and different and fun.

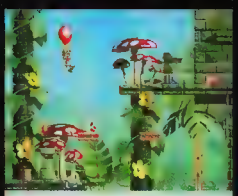
OVERALL RATING: 4.5

MICHAEL JACKSON THE EXPERIENCE

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
Release Date: February 15, 2012

This is perhaps the most interesting game to make the jump to the Vita, but surely an MJ fan will enjoy matching touch-screen finger gestures in time with some of his biggest songs. It also seems to be the one most likely to, if you gesture hard with one hand, send your Vita flying out of the room. So be warned.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5



MODNATION RACERS: ROAD TRIP

Publisher: SCEA
Developer: SCE San Diego
Release Date: February 15, 2012

"Avoid ramming yourself into the guardrails while drifting." Thanks, loading screen! This *ModNation Racers* sequel is Sony's comparatively bland answer to *Mario Kart*, with stylized aesthetics, customizable racers, and a track creation/sharing tool. That could translate to "endless fun"...if it can hold your attention for that long.

OVERALL RATING: 3.0

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA PLUS

Publisher: Tecmo Koei
Developer: Team Ninja
Release Date: February 22, 2012

Face it...the *Ninja Gaiden* games don't really want you to win—and your rewards for trying are many stab wounds and bloody deaths. The Vita take on the series looks fantastic, which you may not notice when you're down to the last pixel of your health bar. The combat is extremely technical, so the easily frustrated need not apply.

OVERALL RATING: 3.75

Others to consider

OUTTA SIGHT

The following games were due out with the release of the PS Vita, but weren't available for review before the issue went to the printer.

BEN 10 GALACTIC RACING

Cartoon Network fans should enjoy racing on 25 themed tracks. Steering by tilting the Vita, doing stunts via the rear touch pad, and multiplayer with up to three friends will be nice extras.

ESCAPE PLAN (PSN)

This stylish black-and-white puzzle game has you using the touch screens to guide the two main characters and interact with the world for hilarious results.

HUSTLE KINGS (PSN)

Here comes billiards with fantastic physics, including ball jumps and trick shots, that you can pocket (get it?). Challenge Vita or PS3 friends, and use the camera to customize the table graphics.

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES (PSN)

PopCap's wild and wonderful take on tower defense comes to yet another platform—and we can't wait to lose ourselves in the action all over again.

SUPER STARDUST DELTA (PSN)

If *Asteroids* was made today, it'd probably be like this. The planet you orbit has an atmosphere filled with space rocks and attacking craft. You have many weapons... and can generate black holes!

TALES OF SPACE: MUTANT BLOBS ATTACK

Oh, no! There's an alien blob devouring everything in its path and...wait, what? Oh, *you're* the blob that's attacking. *Mutant Blobs* is a puzzle/platform game that enables you to trigger special powers with a touch.

VITA VITALS

RAYMAN ORIGINS

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
Release Date: February 15, 2012

It wouldn't get more out of Rayman's colorful, fast-paced 2D world to the console for November, and it translates perfectly to the Vita...with one exception. Some of it doesn't translate well to the smaller screen. Sure, you can use the touch screen to switch your view, but it breaks up the pace too much. It's still an entertaining romp, but with a few speed bumps.

ESRB: E 10+ Everyone 10+ Cartoon Violence

SHINOBIDO 2: REVENGE OF ZEN

Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Spike/Acquire
Release Date: February 22, 2012

Admit it...you have a recurring dream to be a ninja warrior, slinking through the night, and slitting the jugulars of bad guys. Well, dream no more. Make this slice-and-dice adventure your life. The camera is often wonky, but there are many hold-your-breath moments here, especially if you use the rear touchpad to switch to first-person view.

OVERALL RATING: 3.25

ESRB: M Mature 17+ Blood and Gore, Violence

VIRTUA TENNIS 4: WORLD TOUR EDITION

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega/AM3
Release Date: February 22, 2012

Backhanded as this compliment may be, *Virtua Tennis 4* is the closest this series has come to matching its own Dreamcast-era greatness. Its array of career modes, exhibitions, and quirky minigames says "typical sim," but the perfect mix of arcade-style looseness and skill-rewarding responsiveness evokes that elusive *Tennis 2K2* spirit.

OVERALL RATING: 4.0

ESRB: E Everyone

WIPEOUT 2048

Publisher: SCEA
Developer: SCEE Liverpool
Release Date: February 15, 2012

If you get one game as a Vita visual showcase, make it Wipeout 2048. This miniaturized version of the futuristic, weapons-based hovercraft-racer series stands neck-and-neck with its PS3 counterpart (*Wipeout Pure*), with cross-platform track-trading to hammer the spectacle home. Just don't expect an easy ride—*Wipeout 2048*'s AI gets relentless...fast.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25

ESRB: E 10+ Everyone 10+ Mild Violence

VITA MINI

And a handful to save for...

COMING SOON

EVEN MORE!

As if there wasn't enough from the previous pages to add to your wish list, here's another batch of PS Vita games we'll be seeing soon.

GRAVITY RUSH

In a world where you control gravity, the Vita's unique controls enable you to usher around protagonist Kat, so she can protect the innocent from Gravity Storms and other enemies. (2012)

LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 5-7

We don't know much, but we expect the same satirical take on the *Potter* movies, with the Vita's unique hardware features offering added benefits to the gameplay. (March 6)

MLB 12 THE SHOW

MLB The Show is hands down one of the best sports simulations you can get, and we're expecting that the Vita version will have some cool features to again capture our attention. (March 6)

MORTAL KOMBAT

MK fans, get excited: Warner Bros. says that everything in the latest console version *as well as* its post-release DLC will be "in the box"—and it'll feature touch-screen Fatalities and X-Rays. (Spring)

REALITY FIGHTERS

Described as an "augmented reality" game, it uses the Vita's two cameras to create the game's environments and player characters. Imagine seeing yourself fight in your own kitchen? (March 13)

RIDGE RACER

Typical high-intensity *Ridge Racer* action is on tap here, with multiplayer consisting of live races for up to seven players as well as the ability to race others' "ghosts" anytime. (March)

SILENT HILL BOOK OF MEMORIES

Konami has created a Vita-exclusive *Silent Hill*, and if you're a fan of the series, you know it'll be a good frightfest—but for the first time, you'll also be able to share the scares in co-op. (March 27)

SUMIOM - DEMON ARTS

Reminiscent of *Okami*'s visual style, you'll need to "draw" platforms on the screen (to navigate the main character around danger) as well as lines of flame to dispatch foes. (March)

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA SPLITZ

No surprise that Sega will have a Vita-compatible *SMB* soon. It'll offer over 100 levels and eight minigames, plus you'll be able to create levels with the built-in camera—and share them. (Summer)

SUPREMACY MMA: UNRESTRICTED

Rocking an extended roster of real-world brawlers, *Supremacy MMA: Unrestricted* will take full advantage of the Vita's dual touch-screen controls to have you fighting on the go. (March/April)

UNIT 13

Zipper Interactive (developer of the *SOCOM* series) gives us a third-person military shooter for solo play or two-player co-op...with full voice chat. Daily challenges are also promised. (March 6)

TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section.

- A good game with some flaws. Fans of the genre will probably enjoy it.
- A near-perfect gaming experience.

62 STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Hey, meet the crew!

@GAMER wants you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon, so we've put together a different kind of Geek Squad to help you out.

This month, we ask the gamer panel:

If March comes in like a lion, but goes out like a lamb, what game is going to come in like a lion for you?

David Chapman

Like a high-tech preda-

one to pounce off the

Andrew Hayward

Lumines: Electronic

geous Vita display and

Chuck Osborn

Mass Effect 3 is going to

snatch me with its

Timothy J. Seppala

Without a doubt, it'd

Effect 2, and I just can't

TOP PICKS

62 STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC
66 FINAL FANTASY XIII-2
70 KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING
72 SSX
74 SOULCALIBUR V
76 THE DARKNESS II
78 UFC UNDISPUTED 3
79 FIFA STREET
80 MLB 2K12
82 SYNDICATE

MINI-REVIEWS

84 Metal Gear Solid Snake Eater 3D
84 Resident Evil: Revelations
85 Tekken 3D Prime Edition
85 Silent Hill HD Collection
86 Grand Slam Tennis 2
86 Crush3D
87 Tales of Graces f
87 Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2

NOT PICKS

There weren't any games that didn't make the *@GAMER* cut this issue!

▼ The Gunslinger is a specialization of the Smuggler class. Wielding two blasters at the same time, they are masters at trick shots and long-range combat.

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

BioWare's first MMO makes it cool to like *Star Wars* again

• Words: Chuck Osborn

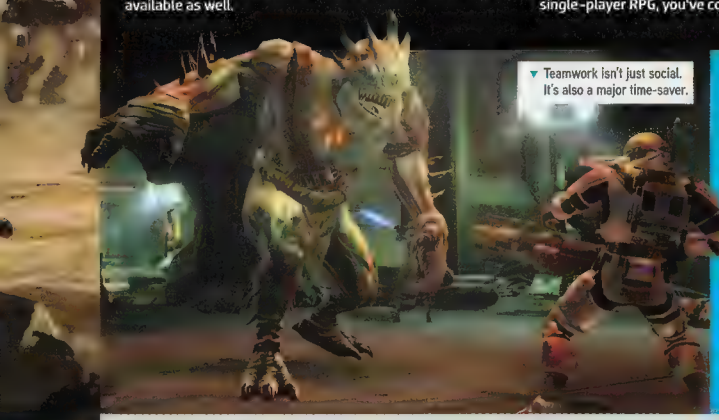
At this point, anyone still wondering if they should try *Star Wars: The Old Republic* probably doesn't play a lot of massively multiplayer online games. The hardcore started playing en masse the day it came out, creating a weeks-long intergalactic traffic jam on the game's servers. No, you're probably curious whether the (allegedly) most expensive game ever made is worth $14.99 a month and the retail-box cost, even if you aren't an MMO diehard.

The answer is a qualified yes. The game melds the deeper storytelling and high production values of single-player RPGs with the huge, persistent worlds and social structure of MMORPGs. You pick a side (Galactic Republic or Sith Empire), choose your iconic class, and then battle for the fate of a universe set thousands of years before Luke met Leia.

Of course, it helps that this galaxy far, far away is nearly identical to the one you've seen in the movies. Droids, blasters, speeders, and, of course, lightsabers are your playthings. All speaking characters are voiced by real actors (an achievement that earned the game a Guinness World Record). And, eventually, you'll get your own starship and be able to visit worlds new and familiar, such as Tatooine, Hoth, and Coruscant. Space combat "railed shooter" missions are available as well.

What makes *SWTOR* delightfully unique is that every playable class (Trooper, Smuggler, Jedi Knight, and Jedi Consular on the Republic side; and Bounty Hunter, Sith Warrior, Imperial Agent, and Sith Inquisitor on the Sith side) has its own overarching storyline broken up into three epic chapters. Not only that, but early on you'll be paired up with a non-player companion who fights alongside you. Unlike other MMO "pets," this one has a personality and can be sent on errands (such as selling goods or increasing trade skills). Sometimes they'll disagree with your choices, lowering their affection for you and depriving you of experience. Or you may become romantically involved. As you gain experience, you'll add more selectable companions to your crew.

That said, *SWTOR* is very much an MMO. While you can play the game solo, it isn't recommended, especially if you want to tackle Heroic quests or PvP missions. Servers are now more comfortably populated and the interface makes finding quick pick-up groups easy. If you're allergic to mannequin-like quest givers, "kill x of y" missions, and competing with doppelgangers of you and your companion for kills, then *SWTOR* won't change your mind about MMOs. But if you're looking for a great MMO that has the depth and detail of a single-player RPG, you've come to the right galaxy.



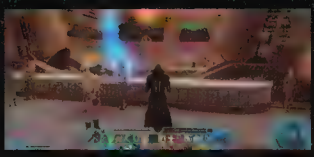
▼ Teamwork isn't just social. It's also a major time-saver.

WHERE'S THE BOSS?

▼ Cinematic cut-scenes punctuate the gameplay, especially between chapters of the main storyline.

▲ In PvP Warzones, Sith and Jedi players battle over territory to earn commendations and Valor points.

▲ The opening movie sets up the conflict beween the Republic and Empire. These two just never get along.



▲ Boss battles are best undertaken as a team effort. You'll usually find other players hanging around to help out.

LIGHT OR DARK SIDE

Despite what you may have heard, the Republic guys aren't necessarily goody-goody and the Sith don't thrive on evil 24/7. Either side can earn Light Side or Dark Side points through choices made in the game. Your alignment affects how other characters react to you, what kind of weapons you can equip, and your physical appearance. So, yes, you can be a benevolent bounty hunter or a bloodthirsty Jedi Knight. If a choice isn't clear in whether it'll give you Light or Dark points (even pure-hearted Jedi can be jerks), the interface lets you know which side of the Force you'll fall on.

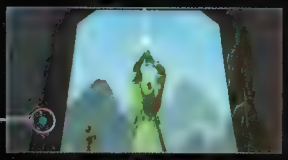
MY LIFE AS A JEDI

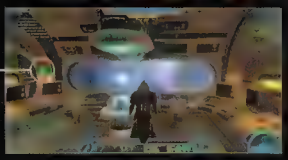
THIS IS MY LIGHTSABER
As a young Jedi Consular padawan, few moments are as awe-inspiring as forging your first lightsaber. At that moment, you are no longer a student in the ways of the Force. The crafting system opens up to you as well.

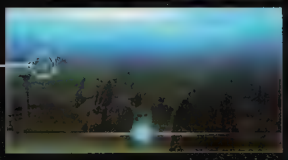
MEETING THE JEDI COUNCIL
Once you get a few missions under your belt, you'll be invited into the Jedi Council to kick it with your elders. In reality, they want to send you on a quest to stop a plague afflicting respected Jedi around the galaxy. Whatever! I still got to hang with a guy who looks a lot like Yoda.

I'M ON A SHIP
Eventually, you'll become so important that a ship will be given to you. The ship not only ferries you from planet to planet, but it can hold extra inventory in its hold and can be modified (much like your companion) to make it more combat-worthy for space missions.

LIGHT ME UP
Choices must be made when interacting with others. Do you turn someone in or look the other way? Kill them or let them live? A "true" Jedi Consular lives a life upholding the virtues of the light side of the Force, though not always. Making the "light choice" awards you with points and a...er, light show.

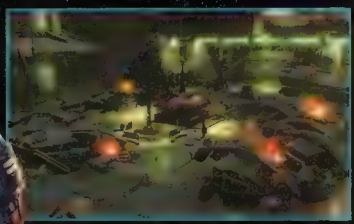






▶ The Zabrak aren't all like Darth Maul. Some like blasters and puppies.

▲ PvP Warzones let Republic and Sith players fight for dominance of the battlefield.



▲ From sand-swept Tatooine to the Hutta moon of Nar Shaddaa, each environment is meticulously detailed.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

INFO
Publisher: EA
Developer: BioWare/LucasArts
Platforms: PC

RELEASE DATE
December 20, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Massively multiplayer

GENRE
MMORPG

SUITABLE FOR
MMO fans, and solo players who love BioWare games and don't mind paying a monthly subscription fee

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Like having eight full RPG campaigns in one game
- ❤ Over 200,000 lines of spoken dialogue
- ❤ An MMO that will satisfy both guildies and soloers

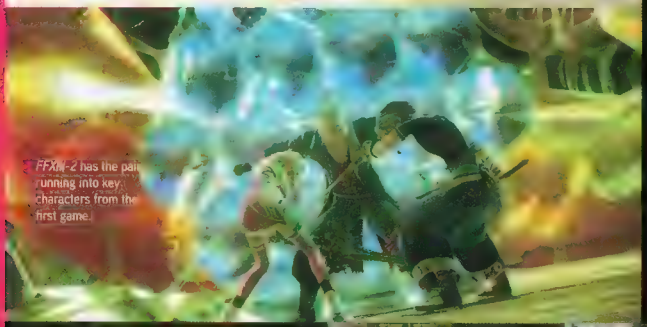
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ That monthly subscription fee adds up over time
- ✖ Crowded launch

WIL SAYS:
I hate MMOs and people who play MMOs. If I could import my *Call of Duty* character, I'd kill all you lightsaber-waving weirdos.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

Some worlds that our intrepid duo will visit make them feel very, very small.



FFXIII-2 has the pair running into key characters from the first game.

It wouldn't be *Final Fantasy* without scads of strange creatures—and stylish bad guys.

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

This time, it's Serah's mission that's crystal clear... • Words: Andy Eddy

It's clear that *Final Fantasy XIII-2*'s designers paid attention to the widespread complaints that followed the release of *Final Fantasy XIII* nearly two years ago. Some said that *FFXIII* was too linear. Others felt that the game took too long before you could fully engage in quests (to the tune of about 30 hours). Considering that *FFXIII-2* lets you move between different locations at will, and acquire quests not long after the adventure starts, it seems that criticisms were indeed considered as *FFXIII-2* was being created.

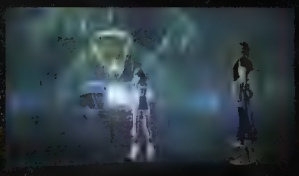
The new game—which is a true sequel rather than a standalone adventure—turns the tables by putting Serah in the lead role in search of her sister, Lightning. (You may remember that Lightning had to rescue Serah from a crystalline eternity in *FFXIII*.) Serah teams with Noel, a young time traveller who appears in town with claims that he's journeying through the eras to halt a future apolcalypse that he's witnessed. Together, the pair needs to visit various locations through different eras—using the Historia Crux—to rectify time paradoxes, though their acts may have a further impact on the universe...and not always with a positive outcome. In some cases, their travels take them to the same location in a different era, with the world and its inhabitants perhaps living out a different history as a result of their prior actions.

Serah and Noel have to gather numerous fragments and "artefacts" (yes, that's how the game spells it), which help them access the many time gates along the Historia Crux. Some items are gathered through boss battles; some are in "clear view," but in another dimension that you'll need your Moogle assistant to reveal. There's plenty to do if you want to fully complete *FFXIII-2*, with, as you'd expect, many hours of exploration and combat in store for you.

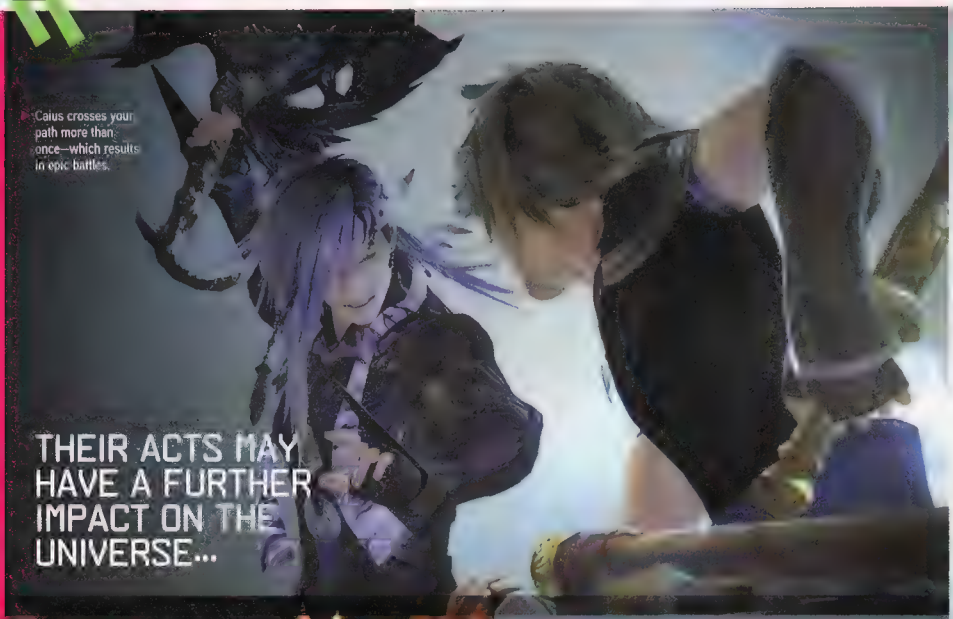
My main issue with *FFXIII-2* is that its battles are quite a bit easier than *FFXIII*'s, and the combat system can be managed under a semi-autopilot setting without penalty. Of course, hardcore fans who want the challenge can pop the difficulty up and take full control during combat. Certainly, all of those who are seeking an interesting, mostly satisfying, and at times weird *Final Fantasy* RPG adventure will get that and more.

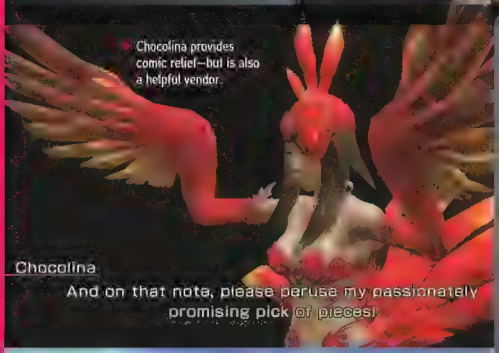
▲ This world has you fighting beasties and changing escalator movement to get to them.

The story takes some emotional turns, and, sorry to say, not everyone will be saved.



▲ Some areas you'll have to visit more than once in order to make progress.

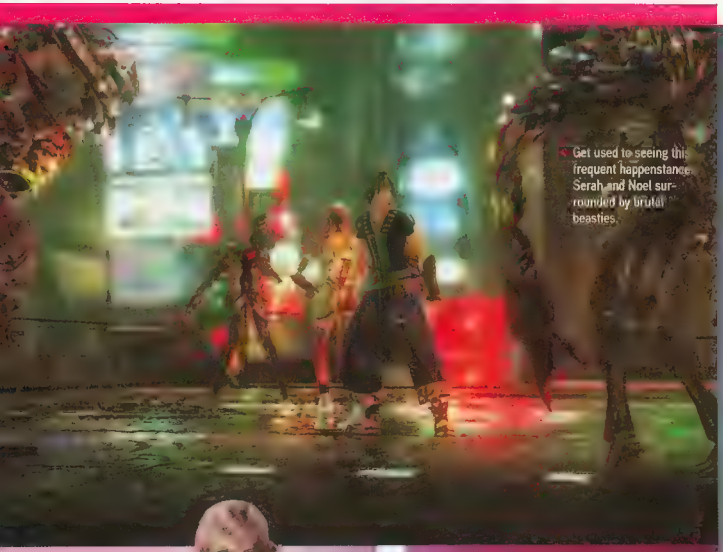

Caius crosses your path more than once—which results in epic battles.
THEIR ACTS MAY HAVE A FURTHER IMPACT ON THE UNIVERSE...


Chocolina provides comic relief—but is also a helpful vendor.
Chocolina
And on that note, please perusa my passionately promising pick of pieces!

MIXING IT UP

Complex combat combinations

If you played *FFXIII*, you'll probably take right to the *FFXIII-2* combat system, which picks up where the other left off with few changes. You still can set up "paradigms," which are structured set-ups of what character will play what role, such as a healing Medic or a peppering Ravager. Six pre-created paradigms—you can set them up at any time when you're not engaged in combat—enable you to quickly switch between them in a battle as needed. Where *FFXIII-2* differs is that there are only two human party members, though they can be supplemented by a creature as a third member—you can "capture" crystals that contain the essence of a defeated foe. The creatures can also be leveled up in the Crystarium in the same manner as Serah and Noel. The system is complex, but once you've learned how it works, it's extremely versatile.



Get used to seeing this frequent happenstance: Serah and Noel surrounded by brutal beasties.

Serah may be waifish, but she can handle a mean Moogle crossbow.

PUZZLE FIGHTERS

[illegible] they're not scrapping with the [illegible]ead monsters that are thrown at [illegible] Serah and Noel—through your brain [illegible]ered to solve puzzles to clear up [illegible] the time paradoxes. It's a nice diver[illegible] from the adventuring and fighting, and [illegible]n't too hard that they'll stump you. [illegible] them require you to beat the clock to [illegible]like-colored crystals, connecting them [illegible]plicating a pattern given to you before [illegible]start. In later segments, some of the [illegible]s require a bit more intuition, thinking [illegible]and effort to surpass them.

NOT A (L)INEAR MISS

Complaints that the game is too linear (as [illegible]y said about FFXIII) shouldn't be made about FFXIII-2. The Historia Crux enables you to move back and forth to any time/place you've unlocked—and you will need to visit some loca[illegible]

It's Serah's turn to be the heroine, and she has nothing but time.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

INFO
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
January 31, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Final Fantasy XIII players who were left unfulfilled; those wanting to try the extremes in RPG design

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The versatile combat system gets a full workout
- ❤ Detailed, gorgeous visuals
- ❤ The characters—girls and guys alike—look so pretty!

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The versatile combat system can make battles too easy
- ✖ Can a couple of teenage fashionistas save the world?

WIL SAYS:
Not being big into RPGs, it was hard to engage with *FFXIII-2*, but I see how a fan could be swept into the story and combat.

OVERALL RATING:

4.25

Reckoning's developers describe the title's ambitious art style—which contrasts dark and light colors—as "Dark Fairytale."
Loot!
There's no shortage of protective head-to-toe gear in which to outfit your avatar.
Killer Combos
Imbuing weapons with magical properties boosts their death-dealing ability
GAME OF THE MONTH

KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING

A new contender for the RPG crown

• Words: Matt Cabral

No matter how narratively rich, epic in scope, or expansive in scale, RPGs often suffer from taking too long to get to the good stuff. As anyone who's embarked on a sprawling save-the-world quest will attest, the first hour or so of "action" is often spent mired in character-building tutorials and having your ear bent by chatty villagers. *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*, EA's much-touted attempt to translate top talent—Todd McFarlane, R.A. Salvatore, Ken Ralston—into RPG success, decidedly rejects this slow-start approach.

Instead, *Reckoning* immediately drops you into a dungeon, leaving little time for leisurely sightseeing or small talk with locals. In a fun plot twist, you begin the game dead; when a tarp's pulled back on the stone slab your lifeless body is occupying, the game neatly transitions into the character-creation screen. Once you tweak and customize your avatar, it's time to rise from the grave.

Within seconds of crawling from a fly-infested corpse pile, you loot an oversized sword from a skeleton and tango with a pack of rodents who'd been eying you for lunch. From there, the resurrected hero rapidly acquires an impressive arsenal that most RPGs wouldn't grant until after a proper amount of grinding. Exiting the dungeon, with a sizable body count in your wake, you will already be comfortable behind swords, staves, bows, shields, daggers, energy spells, and an insta-kill stealth move.

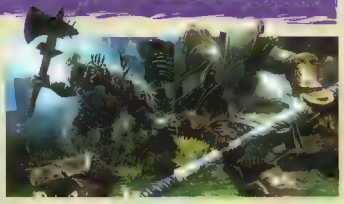
RECKONING REJECTS A SLOW-START APPROACH

New weapons and powers come fast and furious, as do ugly menaces to unleash them on. Thankfully, *Reckoning*'s pace is complemented by the sort of lightning-quick combat usually reserved for dedicated third-person action games. Primary and secondary attacks—as well as blocks and evasions—are intuitively mapped, while a press of the right trigger overlays button inputs with special abilities. Switching from, say, a lumbering warhammer to a pair of blink-and-you'll-miss-them daggers is a smooth affair that'd make even God of War's Kratos proud. If you prefer adorning your broadsword with monster blood rather than sparkly runes, *Reckoning* is the RPG for you.

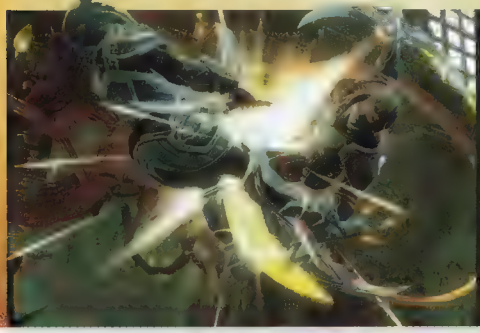
▼ It's always smart to properly equip yourself and distribute any extra ability points before entering especially brutal battles.

IT'S AN RPG, TOO! With thumb-blistering combat, you could almost mistake *Reckoning* for an action game. That, however, would be a mistake akin to fighting a Rock Troll with a rusty dagger. The massive game—plan for 100-plus hours if you wish to see it all—is packed with all of the side quests, faction missions, miscellaneous tasks, and character-building activities you'd expect from an epic do-what-you-want RPG. Additionally, the Destiny system, which grants unparalleled freedom to forge your character and shape their path, is a genre fan's dream. Don't let your twitchy fingers fool you—this one's an RPG beast.

▲ *Reckoning*'s many menaces seem to grow in size as the game progresses. Thankfully, so does your arsenal.



▲ Big baddies are best handled by peppering them from afar with a fire staff before finishing them off with a warhammer.



FRAGILE FATES If crunching baddies into the cobblestones from behind an extensive arsenal of ranged, up-close and magic attacks isn't enough, *Reckoning* also allows you to unravel enemies' fates. As sinister as it sounds, the power—dubbed a Fateshift—can swiftly clear a screen full of enemies, while netting you big XP. The terrorizing trick siphons a replenishable meter though, so unravel with caution.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developers: 38 Studios, Big Huge Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
February 7, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Fantasy RPGers who crave combat that feels as good as it looks

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Sprawling open world brimming with content
- Intuitive character-progression system
- Fluid, lightning-fast combat

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Hardcore fans might find the Destiny system too forgiving
- Camera can get squirrely during close-quarters combat

WIL SAYS:
I've never been one for RPGs, but after getting a taste of Kingdoms I'm starting to rethink my prejudices.

OVERALL RATING:

4.75

SSX

Coming down the mountain... Words: Paul Semel

Writer Peter De Vries once said, "Nostalgia isn't what it used to be." It would be interesting, then, to watch him play *SSX*, since this reboot is a return to what this arcadey snowboard racing and tricking series used to be: a very fun run.

When it began 12 years ago, the SSX series was equal parts racing and trick contests, with the former being as exhilarating as *Need for Speed*, and the latter being as much flippy fun as *Tony Hawk*. But while later installments became more about showing off than going fast, this brings the racing back to the fore, and is the better for it. Sure, it's still fun to turn tricks—especially since they're somewhat forgiving when it comes to landing and getting up after you wipe out—but now it's just as fun to whip down the mountain at breakneck speeds.

Except you now have to whip down the mountain while trying not to break your neck. Crashing into things really hurts, and while you have armor, it breaks rather easily. Thankfully, you also have to wear down your health—which regenerates if you can go a few seconds without getting hurt—before scrubbing out of an event completely. There are even "Survive It" events in which you have to get down the hill in one piece.

The problem with this injury mechanic, though, is that if you're racing or tricking on a particularly dangerous track, you spend more time trying to survive than being speedy or stylish. Granted, bad spills can be corrected by rewinding time—much like a certain Persian prince we know—and most tracks aren't hazardous, but it's still annoying to lose a race because you crashed and burned.

Even with these issues, though, *SSX* is a welcome return to the series's glory days. It may not be exactly what it used to be, but, for the most part, it is a step back in the right direction.

Speed Freak
Like a great racer, *SSX* has a real sense of speed, and the tight controls need to handle it.
YOU SPEND MORE TIME TRYING TO SURVIVE THAN BEING SPEEDY...
Jump for Joy
Arrows tell you to prepare for a big leap. And there are *lots* of 'em.

The absolute best thing about this game: You can play it indoors. Where it's warm.

PS3, XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

EVERYONE E ESRB

SSX

INFO
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
February 28, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Hybrid online gameplay; see the "Comparative Sociology" sidebar

GENRE
Sports

SUITABLE FOR
Original *SSX* players, arcade racers, and nature lovers who hate the cold

NOTHING COMPARES 2 U \\ Like EA's *Need for Speed* games, *SSX* has a persistent online system that lets you compare your status in the game to your friends'. Dubbed RiderNet (since Autolog obviously wouldn't make sense), this allows competitive types to compare race times, trick scores, and Survive It results with their pals, and try to outdo them. Annoyingly, it can also serve as a reminder of how much better your friends are at the game than you.

Instead of letting you race online in real time, *SSX* has you play events (which are only open for a limited time) and then compares your results to your friends' and ranks you accordingly...which, yes, is as unsatisfying as it sounds.

GHOST RIDER
Your friends' ghosts (showing their best rides) inhabit your course, giving you something to race against, even though it's not a live, head-to-head competition.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Really great sense of speed
- For klutzes, its forgiving nature keeps you going

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- New injury mechanic can sometimes pull focus
- Lack of real online multiplayer
- Your talkative buddies are harshing my mellow, dude

ANDY SAYS:
Can't talk...gotta beat this guy's score...ooh, just missed...restart...gah, hit a tree!...rewind...yeah, better...AH, MISSED AGAIN!

OVERALL RATING:

4

SOULCALIBUR V

The soul burns brightly once more • Words: Andrew Hayward

No fighting franchise does weapons-based combat better than *SoulCalibur*, and, likewise, no other series comes close to packing in the kinds of surprising guest characters—such as Link from *The Legend of Zelda* or Darth Vader from *Star Wars*—that we've seen in the past. *SoulCalibur V* maintains the status quo on both counts, offering up the sleekest and most refined entry yet (thanks to numerous tweaks), while also including the best bonus fighter to date.

It's been nearly four years since the release of *SoulCalibur IV*, and the time it has been away has worked aesthetic wonders for the fighting-game series. Detailed and distinctly stylized player models catch the eye, as do the motion blur and explosive light flourishes upon blade hits. But the action also feels more fluid, with smooth transitions between moves and new twists—such as a meter that enables super-powered attacks—plus revised Guard Impacts that repel otherwise unblockable maneuvers.

Some 30 fighters, new and old, highlight the cast, including classic favorites, such as chain whip-toting Ivy and nunchuck-wielding Maxi, along with lead newcomers Patroklos and Pyrrha, a pair of sword-swinging siblings.

SOULCALIBUR V REASSERTS ITS CLAIM TO THE FIGHTING THRONE

And unlike the awkwardly clashing *Star Wars* fighters from the last entry, the bonus fighter—Ezio Auditore from *Assassin's Creed*—fits the historical theme, blending in well with his familiar blades and other weapons from the open-world action games.

Beyond the standard local and online play modes, *SoulCalibur V* debuts a Quick Match offering that approximates the sensation of battling in worldwide arcades, letting you choose foes and claim special tags in victory. Additionally, the game includes a narrative-heavy story quest that introduces the new leads while tying in other fighters. While it's worth playing to unlock certain fighters and content, the story itself is pretty flimsy and the brief experience is forgettable.

With enticing aesthetics and a strong cast of combatants, *SoulCalibur V* reasserts its claim to the blade-clanking fighting throne, and handily tops its 2008 predecessor. However, considering the bold reboots of genre competitors of late, such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, this evolutionary entry can't help but feel slightly more incremental than totally essential.

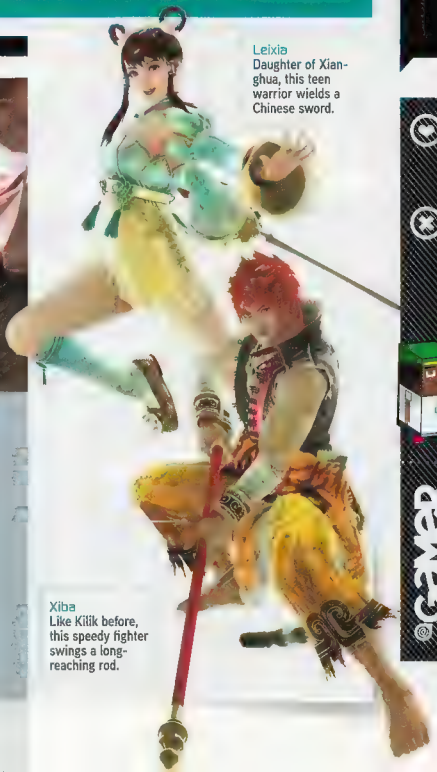
▲ Fresh faces and old favorites battle with blades bared.

▼ All manner of odd clothing and player designs are available.

**FINE-TUNED FIGHTERS ** SoulCalibur's fantastic creation tools are back, letting you mold the hero of your dreams. Starting from scratch or with an established fighter, you can alter aspects such as height, boobs, clothing, and weapon effects, plus tinker Devil Jin's fighting style to be Tekken and design colorful player motifs using dozens of templates and virtual stickers. Prepare for the inevitable onslaught of celebrity and pop-culture lookalikes in the months ahead.

▼ **AWESOME ASSASSIN **

While past entries have typically featured a unique guest character for each console, SoulCalibur V's lone guest fighter is Ezio Auditore from Assassin's Creed, who appears on both PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. And unlike the Star Wars characters of the last game (or comic-hero Spawn from SoulCalibur II), he's a perfect fit in both style and function. Decked out in his iconic robes and sporting familiar Italian quips from Ubisoft's action series, Ezio wields his hidden blades, a sword, a crossbow, and even a gun!



Leixia
Daughter of Xianghua, this teen warrior wields a Chinese sword.

Xiba
Like Kilik before, this speedy fighter swings a long-reaching rod.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

SOULCALIBUR V

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Project Soul (Namco)
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
January 31, 2012

MULTIPLAYER ONLINE
2-player local or online

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Swordplay savants, Ezio enthusiasts

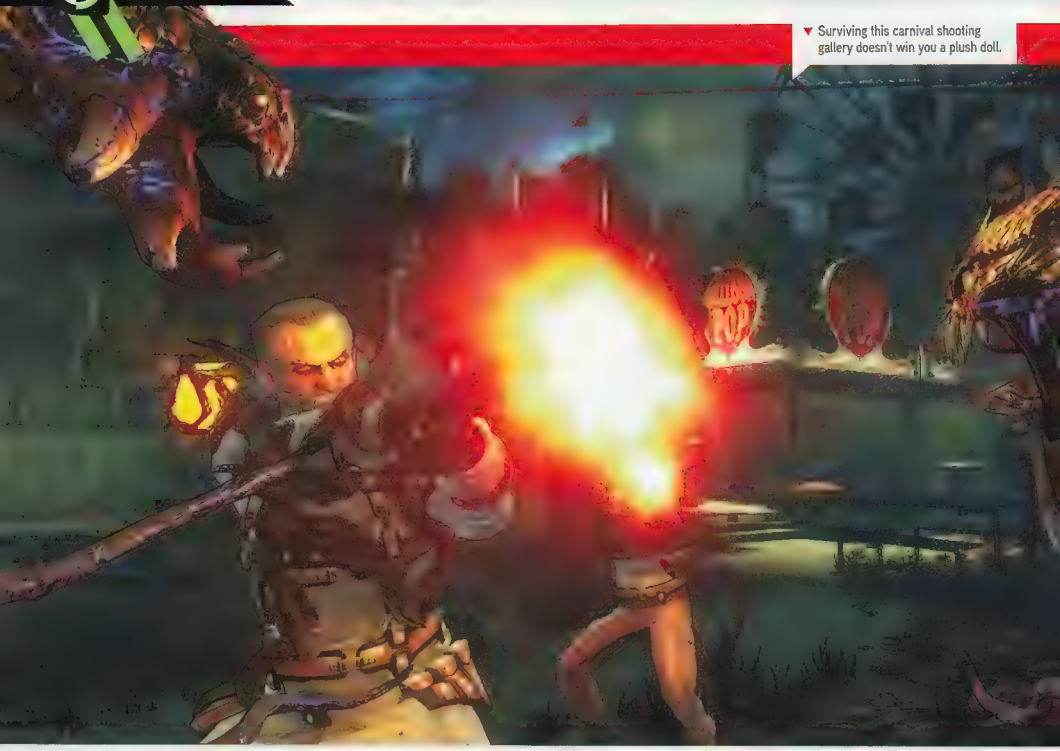
WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Fast and fluid weapons-based combat
- ❤ Much slicker visuals than 2008's *SC4*

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Lacks a big, enthralling time-sink mode
- ✖ Plays it safe while other fighters reinvent

WIL SAYS:
It's great that the *SoulCalibur* franchise makes improvements and takes chances (such as adding Ezio). Just not big ones.

OVERALL RATING:

4



▼ Surviving this carnival shooting gallery doesn't win you a plush doll.

THE DARKNESS II

These aren't your run-of-the-mill shadow puppets · Words: David Chapman

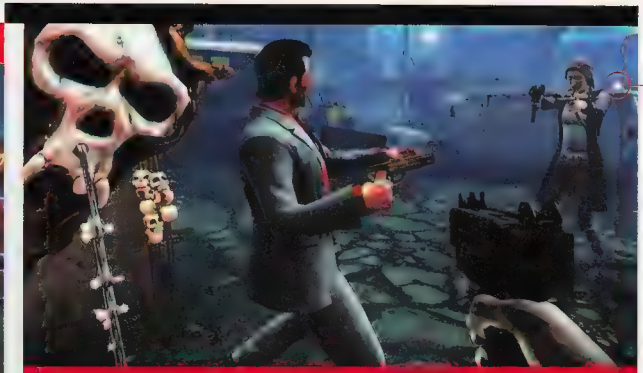
It's been over four years since 2K Games introduced gamers to the world of *The Darkness*. Based on the Top Cow comic, *The Darkness* told the story of Mafia hitman Jackie Estacado, cursed by a supernatural force that manifested from the shadows. Now Jackie's back to prove there's still a reason to be afraid of the dark in *The Darkness II*.

The Darkness II utilizes a hand-drawn, cel-shaded look, which, combined with the story, gives the experience of playing in an actual comic book. Penned by comic scribe and *Darkness* alumnus Paul Jenkins, *The Darkness II* picks up a couple of years after the events of the first game. Jackie has taken control of the Franchetti crime family and managed to contain the power of the Darkness. After being targeted by a cult called The Brotherhood, though, Jackie is forced once again to rely on the power of the Darkness to survive.

One of the things that stood out in the original game was how Jackie's Darkness abilities melded with the gunplay of a regular shooter. Digital Extremes takes this to a new level in *The Darkness II*. Thanks to a new "quad wield" mechanic, you can use two guns and two Darkness tentacles simultaneously for a variety of combos. For example, during one particular shootout, I was using two pistols to blast away at gunmen in the distance while one Darkness appendage held a car door in front of me for cover. When another goon ran up on me swinging a bat, I used my free Darkness tentacle to slice him in half.

While *The Darkness II* is a considerable improvement over the first game, there are still rough spots that could use work. Although the original's abysmal multiplayer has been replaced by a vastly better "Vendettas" mode (see "Bloody Vendettas" sidebar), it still feels as if the multiplayer was an afterthought. Also, while your single Darkling companion makes for a surprisingly competent ally, it's too easy to lose sight of him in the crossfire.

The first *Darkness* game crept out of the shadows and grabbed gamers and comic fans with a compelling story and entertaining gameplay. Even under the harsh light of higher expectations, *The Darkness II* managed to sink its teeth firmly into any reservations I had, and ripped them out like a henchman's heart.



RATED M FOR "MASSACRE"

The Darkness II seems to relish its M rating. Even glossing over the steady swearing and overtly suggestive content, the first time you see one of the gruesome, over-the-top executions (such as pulling a person in half like a human wishbone), you'll know this isn't for the kiddies...and it might be a little much for some adults as well.

JENNY, JENNY... WHO CAN I TURN TO?

One of the key figures in Jackie's life has always been Jenny Romano, his childhood sweetheart. In the first game, Jenny was kidnapped and killed—while Jackie was forced to watch. That's not the end of her story, though, as Jenny still appears to Jackie in *The Darkness II*.

\\ *The Darkness II*'s Vendettas mode is an extra campaign running parallel to the single-player story. You choose from one of four "new guys" recruited into Jackie's Mafia family. Each is gifted with a mystically infused weapon and a tie to the Darkness power, enabling access to a version of one of the special Darkness abilities. You can choose to go through Vendettas missions solo or in online co-op play with up to three friends. Vendettas adds a unique side story to the game's main plot and is a blast with friends, but lacks some of the "multiplayer experience.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

THE DARKNESS II

INFO
Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Digital Extremes
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
February 7, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player online co-op

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Gamers aching for that *Sopranos* meets *The Exorcist* experience

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Story and look has comic-book appeal
- ❤ Vendettas adds new blood to the mix
- ❤ Extra squishy meatbags

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Multiplayer still feels a bit too light
- ✖ Darkling backup can get lost amid the gunfire

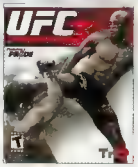
ANDY SAYS:
I'm not a *Darkness* comic *fanboi*, but I played the heck out of the first *Darkness* game...and I'll do the same for this sequel.

OVERALL RATING:

4

UFC UNDISPUTED 3

I don't want to die without a few scars • Words: Timothy J. Seppala



GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

UFC UNDISPUTED 3

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Yuke's
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
February 14, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player online

GENRE
Mixed martial arts

SUITABLE FOR
Guys and gals who wear Tapout gear

I love bloodying virtual faces as much as the next guy, but I need variation to keep me interested. I didn't get that from *UFC Undisputed 3*. The meat of the experience lies in the Career Mode. Problem is, it isn't much different from the past two games. Refinements, such as stripping away locker-room conversations with steel-jawed brawlers, make it the best it's ever been, but there isn't much in the way of surprises. Maybe it's my own fault, but it didn't feel like I had to use different tactics from opponent to opponent to ensure victory.

Career Mode is less about wins and losses than it is about crunching numbers and building the perfect fighter. Training increases one stat or another, but fighting an opponent felt less like battling a human and more about beating his stats. Somehow, even with the most careful preparation, it didn't always feel like my stats had anything to do with emerging victorious. I both won and lost fights the numbers said I shouldn't have.

Classic Fights and lag-free multiplayer were *Undisputed 3*'s lone bright spots for me. Making its return from previous games, Classic Fights once again tasks you to perform specific moves in limited time, while AI stands in your face and beats the snot out of you. The reward is more points and gear for your career fighter, just like in the rest of the game modes.

Points are a shallow incentive that's growing stale. Taking my fighter from the minor leagues to main events felt like a grind, even though the underlying core works as well as it ever has. With this being the third entry in the franchise, I was expecting something more.

ET TUTOR, BRUTE?

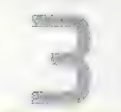
If this is your first time jumping into the virtual Octagon, you'd better play through the tutorial. The controls aren't pick-up-and-play friendly and the AI isn't going to show any mercy on you. If you start it from the main menu, you'll have to repeat portions of it once you start Career Mode. So, don't do that.

- ❤ Tons of fighters and fighting styles to choose from
- ❤ Task-based Classic Fights mode is a great pace changer
- ❤ Joe Rogan going KO-razy
- ✖ Not much variety across gameplay modes
- ✖ Career Mode needs revamp

At least I'll be able to realize my dream of being a UFC champion—"Kil" O'Neal—in my home, thanks to *UFC Undisputed 3*.

OVERALL RATING:

3



Choosing the right fighting style is detrimental to your enjoyment.

▼ *FIFA Street* explores locales from indoor arenas in America to gorgeous fields in Europe.

FIFA STREET

Street ball meets *Tony Hawk* in a decent reboot for EA's soccer series • Words: Sterling McGarvey

With *FIFA Street*, EA has finally achieved a strong base on which to build a future of great street ball experiences. It's not without its wobbly moments—and that's not just the dubstep-heavy soundtrack—but it's the best rendition of the traditionally troubled series to date.

FIFA Street succeeds gameplay-wise because it adapts elements of the superb *FIFA 12*—revamped collision detection, the same likenesses and licensed outfits—to the right degree. And, of course, many of the skill moves that you use in core FIFA games are here. The key to *FIFA Street*'s charm is the *Tony Hawk*-like feeling that it channels as you learn the ins and outs of nutmegs, flicks, and juggles. There are moments when the same sense of combo-based mayhem translate wonderfully into how your footballer dodges, darts, and dribbles past opponents.

Yet it's hard to shake the feeling that there could be more. For all of the robust gameplay that *FIFA Street* musters, it feels like there should be more to do. In club play, your options are a few game types and some custom rules. Some sort of "Be a Pro" as a star player or a career mode as your favorite club would've been a great touch.

Instead, *FIFA Street*'s Career Mode invites you to import your Virtual Pro from *FIFA 12* (but no GameFace, mind you) to captain a squad and build your street ball team from gutters to glory. It's fun to grow and evolve yourself and your squadmates, but the process of upgrading and customizing your team and teammates is quite tedious. An "auto upgrade" option would've been great when you're managing six players' XP after every win. Instead, it's a slog. That said, you can take your squad online for Head to Head Seasons and with every win you get you'll add to your EA Sports Football Club tally.

FIFA Street is an admirable revamp. Despite the clunkiness of its career mode and too few activities for real-life club teams, it's leagues better than its troubled predecessors. It's a great step forward for the series, and worth investigating if you want a break from Manager Mode.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

PS3 XBOX 360

EVERYONE E ESRB

FIFA STREET

INFO
Publisher: EA
Developer: EA Canada
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
March 13, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online; up to 7-player offline (PS3); up to 4-player offline (Xbox 360)

GENRE
Sports

SUITABLE FOR
People who really like Lionel Messi, that small overlap of soccer and *Tony Hawk* fans

WHAT'S GREAT:
- EA finally gets a grip on the formula
- At long last, club teams join national teams
- Creatively uses *FIFA 12*'s engine

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Defending isn't nearly as fun as in *FIFA 12*
- Career Mode is rocky
- No Game Face integration

ANDY SAYS:
While *FIFA Street* isn't perfect, it's nice to see the improvements that Electronic Arts made to add more playability.

OVERALL RATING:

3.75

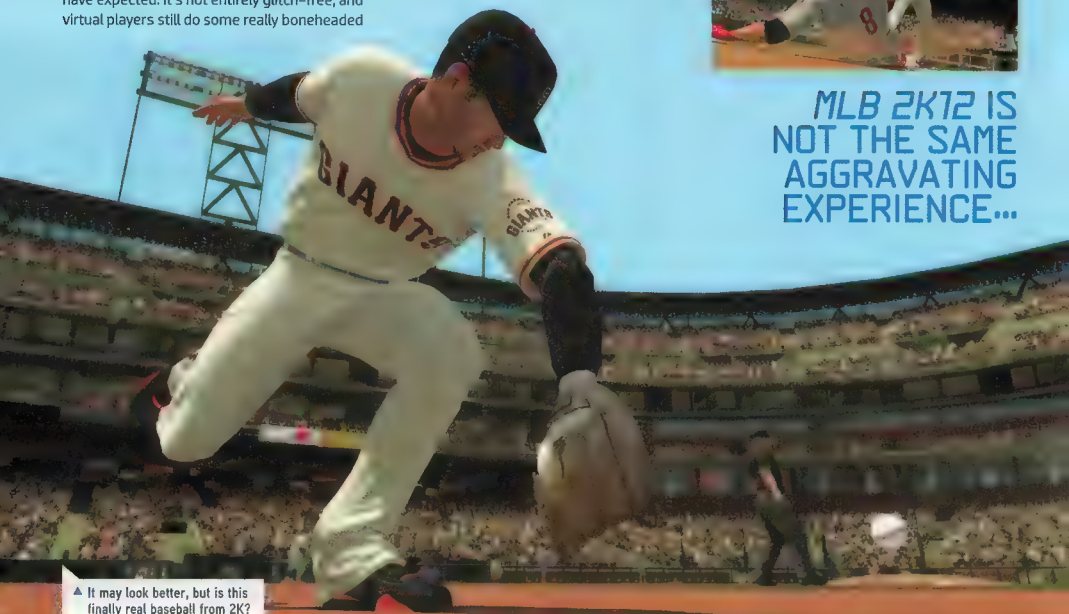
MLB 2K12

You would think that baseball, as a sport, would be something easy to re-create in videogame format. When stripped down beneath its surface of leather, wood, and pine tar, it's a frightfully mathematical game that often seems less like the physical exertions of nine stout men and more like some algorithm disguised as a sunny day's outing in the park.

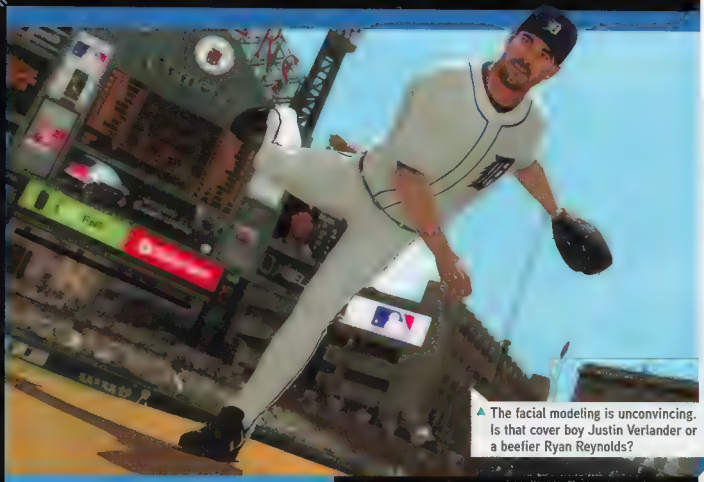
The designers of 2K's long-running baseball franchise have always seemed to have problems with it, though. I'm sure they're fine, upstanding, and highly capable nerds, but their baseball franchise has always proven somewhat lacking, mostly due to rampant glitches, poor production values, and a seemingly lackadaisical passion for the game itself. But this year's edition does more to erase the bad taste of prior editions than anyone could have expected. It's not entirely glitch-free, and virtual players still do some really boneheaded things that would get them cut from a semi-pro team, but the production values have improved somewhat (even if the players don't look that much like their real-life counterparts) and for once it really seems like they're trying. That may sound like condemning the game with faint praise, but the fact that *MLB 2K12* isn't completely awful is borderline revolutionary.

There's not much in terms of new features here, but a refinement of what was already there is more than welcome. Graphics seem crisper, even if the camera angles are still lacking, and the player models look a bit unnatural. The fact that the game avoids really ludicrous happenings (crazy animation glitches and the like) 95 percent of the time is good enough for me. 2K still can't hold a candle to Sony's *MLB The Show* franchise, but I'm starting to enjoy the single-player campaign—where you take an individual player and advance him through the minors, and hopefully into the Hall of Fame—a lot more than *The Show*'s, and since that's the mode I play more than anything, that really matters to me. But whatever your chosen mode of play is, you'll be happy to know that *MLB 2K12* is not the same aggravating experience the series was before. It's not a home run, but sometimes a small ball can take you all the way.

MLB 2K12 IS NOT THE SAME AGGRAVATING EXPERIENCE...



▲ It may look better, but is this finally real baseball from 2K?



▲ The facial modeling is unconvincing. Is that cover boy Justin Verlander or a beefier Ryan Reynolds?

BEAST MODE

The "My Player" mode has become an expected part of any baseball simulator. Known as "Road to the Show" in *MLB The Show*, there's something a little more fun and engaging about the RPG-like leveling up of your player in 2K12. Starting out in the minors, you can build your player from the ground up, define what kind of guy you want him to be—the speedy leadoff man, the dominating closer, the slugger, etc.—and then take part in every moment of his career. Or just sim it and see what happens.

CRAZY LEGS \\

If there is one aspect that needs some serious help (in this game and *The Show*), it's base-running mechanics. They're clunky, unresponsive, and probably completely inscrutable to anyone who never played the game in real life (softball doesn't count). I have a crazy suggestion: Make it completely automated by default, improve the AI, and maybe let us send in old-style hand signals like the base coaches. Hello, Kinect support!

▲ "Bang-bang" plays on the bases leave little room for mistakes when you're trying to move guys around.

LOOK AND FEEL \\

▲ The devil is always in the details, but *über*-detailed ballparks don't mean better gameplay.

▲ Nobody tries to throw out runners at first from the outfield after Little League. Nobody.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC PSP DS

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS \\

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K12

INFO
Publisher: 2K Sports
Developer: Visual Concepts
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC, PS2, PSP, Nintendo DS
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 6, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player online or local

GENRE
Sports

SUITABLE FOR
Any baseball fan who doesn't have a PS3, since they can play *MLB The Show* instead

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ It runs more stably...and that's saying something
- ❤ My Player Mode is addictive; you'll get multiple players going at once

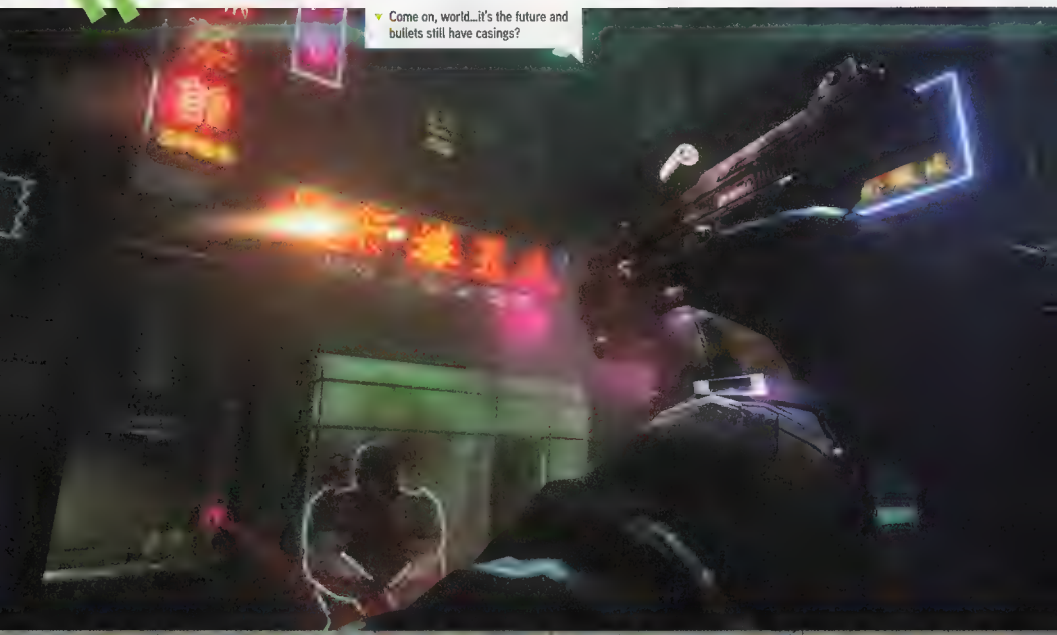
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Online is ruined by even slight lag
- ✖ Inconsistent animations cause random speedups and slowdowns
- ✖ Analog batting controls are *waaayyy* sensitive

WIL SAYS:
I can't wait to see what Sony brings to the plate with *MLB The Show*. There's a great competition going on here!

OFFICIAL GAMER

OVERALL RATING:

3.5



Come on, world...it's the future and bullets still have casings?

SYNDICATE

This ain't your father's *Syndicate*...but is that a bad thing? Words Will Tuttle

While developers continue to churn out their futuristic sci-fi games in dystopian societies (*Human's Edge*, *Deus Ex*, etc.), Sweden-based Starbreeze Studios is no different. Syndicate—the latest game from the creators of *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* and *The Darkness*—takes place in one such future.

Men and women have been enhanced by neural chips that enable them to access information with just a thought (so long, smartphones!), which at first blush sounds like a pretty good deal. However, the multinational companies—the syndicates the title refers to—behind said chips are now far more powerful than any government, making industrial espionage a booming business. That's where you come in. As Miles Kilo, an elite agent for the all-powerful and particularly nefarious-sounding EuroCorp, you're tasked with carrying out the syndicate's dirty work, with theft, infiltration, and assassination being your tools of the trade.

TEAMWORK AND MULTITASKING ARE ABSOLUTE NECESSITIES

While Syndicate is a fairly straightforward first-person shooter, your character's chip abilities help it stand out from the crowd. Hacking a nearby enemy's neural chip to force him to commit suicide by grenade or attack his companions never gets old, and it's downright essential during some of the game's tougher sequences. There are times when the action [illegible] yourself quickly switching between chip powers and good old-fashioned firepower. Ultimately, the rock-solid combat can't help a surprisingly pedestrian plot that [illegible] several twists that you'll see coming from a mile away.

The single-player campaign also pales in comparison to the co-op mode, which features a much deeper research/upgrade system and greater replay value. Up to four players can join forces to complete 10 standalone missions, each of which is more challenging than the last. Teamwork and multitasking skills are absolute necessities, as you'll find yourself healing your friends or hacking terminals while simultaneously shooting baddies. The sheer intensity and variety of combat options in the co-op mode are a lot to handle at first, but you'll undoubtedly find yourself coming back for more.

Thanks to near constant overlays, there's a lot of info onscreen at any given moment.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

SYNDICATE

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Starbreeze Studios
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
February 21, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
4-player online co-op; clan support

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Cyberpunks, Aldous Huxley fans, wannabe CEOs

LEST FROM THE PAST

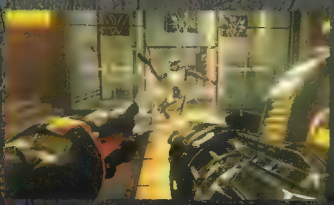
While *Syndicate* is a reboot of an early-'90s game, it's got very little in common with its predecessor. For one, this *Syndicate* is an FPS, while the old one was an isometric strategy game. Also, the new game probably won't run on your Amiga CD32.

Being able to see your enemies through objects definitely has some tactical advantages.

Not just a pretty voice

Although your character is silent, you'll hear a number of Hollywood heavyweights in *Syndicate*. While Brian Cox (*X2*) and Rosario Dawson (*Sin City*) stand out, *Halo 2* fans might recognize Michael "The Crow" Wincott as the voice of that popular shooter's Prophet of Truth.

This being a Starbreeze game, tunnels and [illegible] ronments abound.



Is there anything in the world a minigun can't handle?

WHAT'S GREAT:

- Co-op mode is a ton of fun
- Chip abilities make for some memorable combat moments
- Weapon research and chip upgrades will keep you coming back to co-op

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- Linear single-player mode leaves a lot to be desired
- No head-to-head multiplayer

WIL SAYS:
When I heard that EA was "re-imagining" *Syndicate*, I wasn't expecting much. But the final result, especially co-op, is fun!

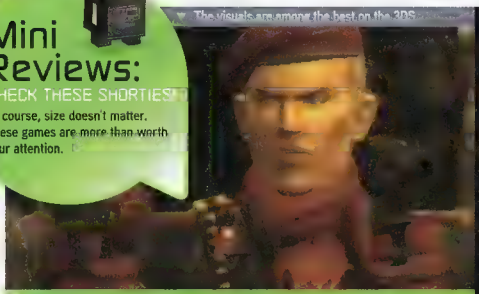
OVERALL RATING:

4

Mini Reviews:

CHECK THESE SHORTIES!

Of course, size doesn't matter. These games are more than worth your attention.



The visuals are among the best on the 3DS.

Some of the scenes look beyond amazing in 3D.

METAL GEAR SOLID SNAKE EATER 3D

MATURE 17+

Publisher: Konami • Developer: Konami •
Platforms: Nintendo 3DS • Words: Hollander Cooper

Metal Gear Solid's remakes usually trump the originals handily. The trend continues with *Metal Gear Solid Snake Eater 3D*, which not only shrinks Snake's incredible, cinematic tale of espionage and betrayal onto Nintendo's handheld, but improves upon the classic with superior graphics and 3D visuals that are among the best I've seen on the 3DS. The only caveat comes from the lack of a second analog stick, which, as expected, makes for a slightly less fluid experience. But there's a trade-off: This version uses the handheld's features to their fullest, letting you take pictures to use as camouflage, balance Snake with the gyroscope, and use the touch screen to navigate MGS's many menus. Granted, you can also pick up the Circle Pad Pro, which lets you get the best of both worlds while you play one of the finest 3DS games to date.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only
GENRE Stealth-action
RELEASE DATE
February 21, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Anyone looking to take Snake's adventure portable

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS

MATURE 17+

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Capcom •
Platforms: Nintendo 3DS • Words: Neilie Johnson

Spec-ops specialists Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield are back in a seafaring tale of bioterrorism and betrayal. *Revelations*, which occurs between *RE4* and *RE5*, has a silly, overcomplicated plot, but creeping through derelict cruise ships shooting monsters totally makes up for it. There's just the right amount of combat, boss fights, puzzle-solving, and exploration—and at least once a chapter, you'll sigh with relief after surviving by the skin of your teeth. A handy gadget called The Genesis helps you scan for upgrades and extras.

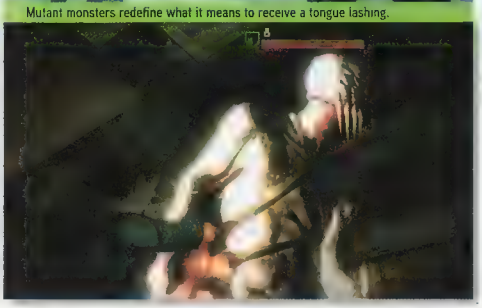
In addition to Campaign Mode, Raid Mode offers more single-player and co-op missions via 3DS StreetPass. Warning: Blurry 3D is a headache, and if you find sluggish movement and a temperamental camera bothersome, then *Revelations* isn't for you.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op online or local
GENRE Survival horror
RELEASE DATE
February 7, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
People who dig things that go bump in the night

OVERALL RATING:

4

Crazy what a simple virus can do to your average snowshoe rabbit.



Mutant monsters redefine what it means to receive a tongue lashing.

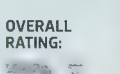
TEKKEN 3D PRIME EDITION

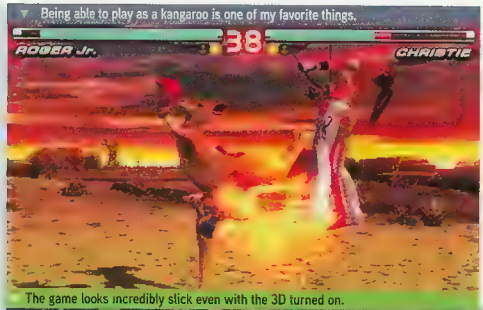
Publisher: Namco Bandai • Developer: Namco Bandai •
Platforms: Nintendo 3DS • Words: Hollander Cooper

The series that first popularized 3D fighting games is back—though in a different form. *Tekken 3D Prime Edition* is essentially *Tekken 6* in handheld form, including over 40 fighters and multiple game modes for both offline and online play. The presentation really shines, outdoing *Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition* and *Dead or Alive Dimensions* by managing to pull off smooth animation with the 3D on, making the fighters stand out. *Prime Edition* makes good use of the 3DS's other features by enabling you to unleash combos via the touch screen, and using StreetPass to exchange *Tekken* cards. My biggest complaint is the lack of a true Story Mode, though the inclusion of the 3D CGI film *Tekken: Blood Vengeance* gives enough context to the characters to make up for it.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player online or local
GENRE Fighting
RELEASE DATE
February 14, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who wants to beat up a panda as a kangaroo

OVERALL RATING:





Being able to play as a kangaroo is one of my favorite things.

The game looks incredibly slick even with the 3D turned on.

SILENT HILL HD COLLECTION

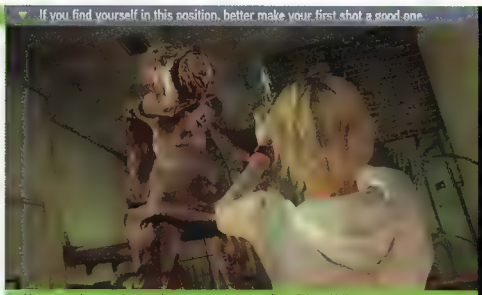
Publisher: Konami • Developer: Hi Jinx Studios •
Platforms: PS3 • Words: Chuck Osborn

Calling this set a "collection" is somewhat misleading. *Silent Hill HD Collection* includes only two games in the disturbing survival-horror franchise—2001's SH2 and 2003's *SH3*—remastered from their PS2 beginnings into PS3 high-definition. Conspicuously absent is the original 1999 PS game or any of the many sequels after SH3.

What you get are slightly touched-up versions of the original two games in gruesome detail, including the extra content from the *Restless Dreams* rerelease of SH2. In both, you battle macabre, lumbering monsters that make RE's zombies seem peppy. Too many locked doors, too-murky environments, and touchy controls may unnerve some, but series stalwarts will be in creepy-crawly heaven.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only
GENRE Survival horror
RELEASE DATE
March 6, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Horror-philes; those wanting to replay the originals in HD

OVERALL RATING:



If you find yourself in this position, better make your first shot a good one.

You never know what you're going to run into in a *Silent Hill* game.

GRAND SLAM TENNIS 2

EVERYONE E ESRB

Publisher: EA • Developers: EA Canada • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360 • Reviewed on: Xbox 360 • Words: Gord Goble

In 2009, EA unveiled Grand Slam Tennis, a game that surprisingly surfaced only on Nintendo's Wii. Now, Grand Slam's successor circumvents the Wii entirely, forcing you to go the PS3 route instead if you want to physically "Move." Yet even for players bereft of motion control, GST2 is still a smashing example of virtual tennis.

I auditioned GST2 on an Xbox 360 and soon realized it flaunts the full-bore EA treatment: slick TV-style presentation, glossy graphics, a whole whack of tennis legends, and more play modes than you can shake a headband at. It's a big, brash affair where you use the right analog stick as a racquet, create ridiculously detailed players from scratch, and indulge in the most sophisticated look ever at the sport of tennis.

Redesign teething pains are evident. Shots rarely drop out of bounds, and returns of light-speed Nadal flamethrowers are criminally easy. Still, GPT2 is big-league tennis in almost every other way.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player online
GENRE Sports
RELEASE DATE
February 14, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who knows that "love-love" is a score

OVERALL RATING: 4

CRUSH3D

EVERYONE 10+ E10+ ESRB

Publisher: Sega • Developer: Sega
Platforms: Nintendo 3DS • Words: Hollander Cooper

Few games have bent my mind as much as *Crush3D*, Sega's remake of the underappreciated PSP original. Though it might seem like a typical platformer at first, it's anything but—in fact, *Crush3D* has more in common with *Portal* than it does *Super Mario Bros.*

In order to escape from each level, I needed to literally "crush" the world into 2D, which enabled me to access distant platforms and areas I never could have reached otherwise. Each level seemed completely impossible at first, but by crushing and reverting the world as I saw fit, I would always be able to make my way through, leading Danny, the bathrobe-clad protagonist, one step closer to escaping the computer that his mind is stuck in. Later levels pile on more and more mechanics (sometimes leading to frustration), but it never felt unfair—and the game made me use parts of my brain that I forgot I even had. I like that.

Single-player only
Puzzle-platformer
March 6, 2012
Fans of mind-warping platformers

OVERALL RATING: 4

You don't get as much from the 3D as you'd expect, but it's a nice touch.

There really aren't enough multi-dimensional puzzlers.

TALES OF GRACES F

Publisher: Namco Bandai • **Developer:** Namco Tales Studio • **Platforms:** PS3 • **Words:** Heidi Kemps

Tales of Graces f is a slow starter: The first few hours have you controlling the protagonists as children in an extended tutorial replete with Japanese RPG plot clichés. Fortunately, entering in-game adulthood reveals a far more entertaining title in both gameplay and story departments. Combat is intense, playing much more like a frenetic action game than stereotypical slow-paced, methodical RPG fights. Learning dodging, time strikes, and chain attacks to max out damage is tons of fun, as are the in-depth weapon and skill upgrade systems.

While the story is merely serviceable, party interactions are highly entertaining, and charming dialogue "skits" scattered throughout further establish the characters. Rewards for exploration are copious, though dated visuals make the game's world feel a bit less wondrous than it should. Overall, though, it's a pleasant comeback for a beloved Japanese series that's been long absent from the West.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player local

GENRE
RPG

RELEASE DATE
March 13, 2012

SUITABLE FOR
RPGers with an action-game affinity

OVERALL RATING:

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DEVIL SURVIVOR 2

Publisher: Atlus • **Developer:** Atlus • **Platforms:** Nintendo DS • **Words:** David Chapman

Atlus's take on *Pokémon*, by way of the *Hellraiser* tactical RPG series, returns...and once again, things are looking bad for Tokyo. As before, you must recruit an army of demons to fight back against an invading evil and to prevent the deaths of those closest to you—deaths foretold via video clips posted to a mysterious website.

Fans of the original will be happy to see familiar options—such as the Auction House and Fusion mechanics—tweaked a bit and applied to the game's expanded roster of demons. Plus, the new "Enishi" system gives you new abilities based on your friendship levels with teammates. Unfortunately, the overall presentation feels like a step backwards, especially after playing the 3DS Overclocked remake of the original.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Tactical RPG

RELEASE DATE
February 28, 2012

SUITABLE FOR
Gamers looking for a darker spin to the *Pokémon* formula

OVERALL RATING:

How you talk to others can help or hurt your chances.
Wouldn't there be fire trucks and such going around after an earthquake like this?
B Back
Y Skills
Remove
Assign

Words: Ryan Scott

DOWNLOAD DIGEST

Interested in downloadable games? *@GAMER*'s dedicated review column covers new titles, episodes, and add-ons to consider for your console and PC.

The warrior's shield and sledgehammer are two of the greatest tools at your disposal.

The thief's mobility allows her to reach places that the other two characters cannot

TRINE 2

Publisher: Atlus • **Developer:** Frozenbyte • **Price:** $15 •
Platforms: PC (December 7, 2011), XBLA/PSN (December 20, 2011)

Following the footsteps of its 2009 predecessor, *Trine 2* is a clever, puzzle-heavy take on traditional side-scrolling platforming, sending a trio of stereotypical fantasy adventurers on a mysterious and action-packed journey. But these do-gooders' capabilities are anything but stereotypical: The warrior battles adversaries head-on and takes a mighty sledgehammer to anything fragile; the wizard conjures and levitates environmental objects; and the thief fires arrows and employs a grappling hook to traverse otherwise problematic areas.

And while *Trine 2* includes its fair share of combat, button mashing isn't the focus here. You're free to swap between the three characters as you see fit, routinely calling on their combined talents to solve a physics conundrum or defeat some tricky boss. Though the puzzle system is as forgiving as you want it to be—the truly stuck can solicit a hint or two—it's also satisfying and formidable for those who refuse to throw their hands up. Even the act of opening a door can take some careful thought to work out, and hitting upon a clever solution always brings a sense of satisfaction. I daresay that *Trine 2* is one of the best downloadable games to come out in the last year, and it's certainly worth every penny.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

Don't let the early levels fool you—Choplifter HD gets pretty freakin' difficult later on!

CHOPLIFTER HD

Publisher: Konami • **Developer:** inXile Entertainment • **Price:** $15
Platforms: PSN (January 10, 2012), XBLA/PC (January 11, 2012)

This modern *Choplifter* update sticks to the classic Apple II game's simple premise: You pilot a combat helicopter into hostile territory, rescue prisoners of war, and taxi them to safety before your chopper bites the dust. Striking the right balance between offense and sheer speed (often versus a ticking clock) is almost a puzzle in itself; *Choplifter HD*'s rigidity manages to work in its favor, largely preventing boredom and presenting a tense—sometimes insane—challenge in its generous number of levels.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

The black lion is for chumps. It's all about the green lion!

VOLTRON: DEFENDER OF THE UNIVERSE

Publisher: THQ • **Developer:** Behaviour Interactive • **Price:** $10 •
Platforms: XBLA/PSN (November 29, 2011)

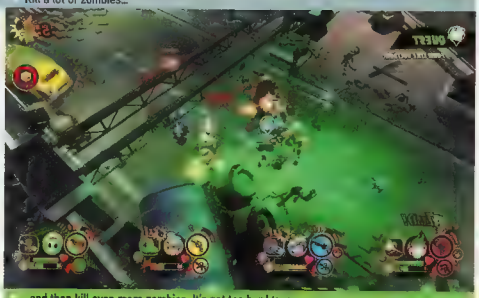
It took long enough to get a game based on the beloved Japanese anime about a five-strong band of pilots whose mechanized lion-tanks fuse into a butt-kicking robot—and the result is pretty average. The overly chaotic, top-down action gameplay superficially resembles a '90s arcade game (think *Smash TV* or *Gauntlet Legends*), and in those rare moments that see you controlling the fully assembled Voltron, the action drops into disappointing quick-time event territory. *Voltron*'s five-player co-op might improve things...if anyone were playing, that is.

OVERALL RATING: 3.0

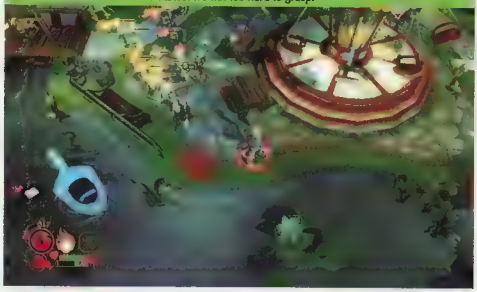
ALL ZOMBIES MUST DIE

Publisher: Square Enix • Developer: Doublesix • Price: $10 • Platforms: XBLA/PSN (December 27, 2011)

Kill a lot of zombies...



...and then kill even more zombies. It's not too hard to grasp.

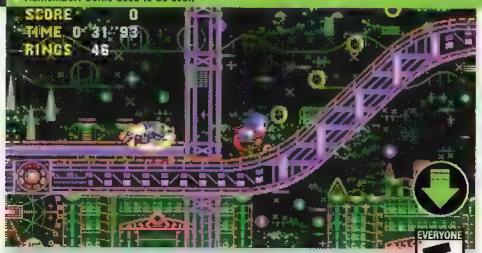


Conceptually, *All Zombies Must Die* is a cool and quirky game—a stylized, tongue-in-cheek, kill-everything-that-moves action bonanza that finds up to four players crafting weird weapons as they level up a quartet of zombie-killing characters. It's got an appropriately comic-booky art style, a loose narrative to tie the four playable characters together, and a soundtrack that sounds like a cross between a John Carpenter score and something out of *Ratchet & Clank*.

The title's lack of gameplay variety becomes apparent very quickly; *All Zombies Must Die* is essentially a simplistic and shallow top-down action/arcade game. The linear levels are all structured in very similar manners, and success almost always boils down to shucking and jiving past an ever-growing horde of zombies as you attempt to either: a) rack up a specific number of kills, or b) locate the necessary item that will enable you to pass the next checkpoint. This setup never really gives way to anything more interesting, and, frankly, *All Zombies Must Die* runs out of steam way too quickly. It's great fun to mow down scores of cartoony undead, and it's even more fun with a group of friends...but it just isn't fun for as long as it ought to be.

OVERALL RATING: 3.0

Remember: Sonic used to be cool!



SONIC CD

Publisher: Sega Developer: Sonic Team Price: $5
Platforms: XBLA (December 14, 2011), PSN (December 20, 2011)

Remember the days when Sonic the Hedgehog, Sega's bad-boy mascot, was genuinely awesome? Given the many mediocre Sonic games since the little blue blur's jump to 3D—and the series's steady return to its 2D roots—I'd say Sega's certainly trying to recall those halcyon times. This *Sonic CD* re-release presents the titular character at his best, offering a no-frills, high-speed romp through a generous collection of side-scrolling stages. It's a platform junkie's paradise, and it should remind you why Sonic was once more than a bad Internet joke.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25

Final Fantasy VI gave us Ultros, one of the most bizarre bosses in RPG history.

FINAL FANTASY VI

Publisher: Square Enix • Developer: Square • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (December 6, 2011)

Arguably the greatest role-playing game ever created, the Super NES-era *Final Fantasy VI* finally makes its way to the PlayStation Store. *FF6* features the most eclectic cast of characters and perhaps the most nuanced story in the series (it concerns a group of mysterious alien beings, and various parties' race to control their power), and the series's classic combat mechanics are at their peak here. Top it off with one of the best soundtracks in gaming history and you have a timeless, enthralling, must-play adventure.

OVERALL RATING: 5.0

A-Z OF AGamer RATINGS

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
A		
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	14	2.75
The Adventures of Tintin	16	2.5
Air Conflicts: Secret Wars	13	3
Alice: Madness Returns	11	4.5
Assassin's Creed Revelations	15	4.5
B		
Batman: Arkham City	14	5
Battlefield 3	15	4
Bit.Trip.Complete	14	4.5
Bit.Trip Saga	14	4.25
The Black Eyed Peas Experience	16	3.5
Bodycount	13	3.75
Brink	11	2.75
C		
Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2012	13	2.5
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	15	4.75
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	12	2.5
Camping Mama: Outdoor Adventures	14	3
Captain America: Super Soldier	12	4
Carnival Island	16	3
Cars 2	11	3.5
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion XL	16	2.5
Catherine	12	5
Child of Eden	11	2.75
Cooking Mama 4	15	4.25
Crazy Machines Elements	11	3.5
Crush3D	17	4
Cursed Crusade	15	2.75
D		
Dance Central 2	14	4
The Darkness II	17	4
Dark Souls	14	4.5
Dead Island	14	2.5
Dead Rising 2: Off the Record	15	3
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	12	4.75
Disney Universe	15	3
Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Tenkaichi	16	2.75
Driver: Renegade	12	3.5
Driver: San Francisco	13	4.25
Duke Nukem Forever	12	2.75
Dungeon Defenders	11	4.5
Dungeon Siege III	11	4
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 3	11	3.25
E		
Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon	12	4
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron	12	4
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	16	5
EyePet & Friends	16	2.75
F		
F1 2011	14	4
Fable III (PC)	11	4.5
F.E.A.R. 3	12	3.75
FIFA 12	13	4.75
FIFA Street	17	3.75
Final Fantasy XIII-2	17	4.25
Forza Motorsport 4	14	4.5
From Dust	12	4.25

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
G		
Gears of War 3	13	4.25
Go Vacation	15	3
God of War: Origins Collection	13	3.75
Goldeneye 007: Reloaded	16	3
Grand Slam Tennis 2	17	4
Green Lantern: Rise of the Maneaters	12	2.75
The Gunstringer	13	3
H		
Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary	16	4
Harry Potter/Deathly Hallows - Part 2	12	2.5
Hole in the Wall: Deluxe Edition	15	2.5
The House of the Dead: Overkill—Extended Cut	15	3.75
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	12	2.75
I		
Ico and Shadow of the Colossus Collection	13	4.75
InFamous 2	12	4.75
J		
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	13	4.25
Jurassic Park: The Game	16	2.75
Just Dance 3	14	3
K		
Karaoke Revolution Glee: Volume 3	16	4.5
Kinect Disneyland Adventures	16	4.5
Kinect Sports Season Two	16	3
King of Fighters XIII	16	2.5
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	17	4.75
Kirby Mass Attack	14	4
Kirby's Return to Dream Land	16	3.25
L		
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	11	4.5
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	15	4.5
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	16	4.25
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	10	4.25
The Lord of the Rings: War in the North	15	3.75
M		
Madden NFL 12	12	4.5
Mahjong Cub3d	15	2.75
Mario Kart 7	16	4
Marvel Pinball: Fantastic Four	11	4
Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest	16	3.25
Metal Gear Solid Snake Eater 3D	17	4.5
Might & Magic Heroes VI	15	3.5
MLB 2K12	17	3.5
N		
NASCAR Unleashed	15	3.5
NBA 2K12	14	4.75
NCAA Football 12	12	4.5
Need For Speed The Run	16	3.5
NeverDead	17	2.5
NHL 12	13	3
Nicktoons MLB	14	2.75
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	12	3.75
O		
Otomedius Excellent	16	2.5

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
Outland	11	4.25
P		
Pokémon Rumble Blast	15	2.5
PowerUp Heroes	14	4.25
Pro Evolution Soccer 2012	15	3.5
R		
Rage	14	4.5
Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One	15	4
Raving Rabbids: Alive & Kicking	15	3.25
Rayman Origins	15	4.5
Red Orchestra 2	14	3.75
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	11	4.5
Resident Evil: Revelations	17	4
Resistance 3	13	4.5
Rise of Nightmares	13	3.5
S		
Saints Row: The Third	15	4.25
Serious Sam 3: BFE	16	4.25
Shadows of the Damned	11	4.25
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2	17	3.75
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked	13	4.75
Silent Hill HD Collection	17	2.75
The Sims 3: Generations	11	4
The Sims 3: Pets	14	4
Sniper: Ghost Warrior (PS3)	11	3.5
Sonic Generations	15	3.25
SoulCalibur V	17	4
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	15	4
SSX	17	4
Star Fox 64 3D	13	4.25
Star Wars: The Old Republic	17	4.5
Stronghold 3	15	2.5
Super Mario 3D Land	16	4.5
Supremacy MMA	13	2.5
Syndicate	17	4
T		
Tales of Graces f	17	4
Tekken 3D Prime Edition	17	3.5
Tekken Hybrid	16	2.5
Tetris Axis	15	3.25
Tropico 4	12	4.25
U		
UFC Undisputed 3	17	3
Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3	16	5
Uncharted 3	15	5
V		
Virtua Tennis 4	10	3.5
W		
Warhammer 40K: Space Marine	13	4
White Knight Chronicles II	14	2.5
The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings	11	5
World of Tanks	14	4
WWE '12	16	4
Y		
Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2012	16	4.5

GEAR

Where to purchase?

Online

Visit www.bestbuy.com for info on availability.

92 Plantronics Gamecom 780 Headset

93 Trilton Wireless Xbox 360 Headset

94 Rockelfish Wired Headset for Xbox 360 and PS3

95 Nyko Power Grip for Nintendo 3DS

WIL SAYS:

I hope we didn't over-saturate you with hardware this month with the awesome "Gaming PC Build-It" feature (page 44), because there's much more gear where that came from.

Photos: Samantha Berg

MIND THE MIC
The headset's sturdy, flexible microphone is top-flight and has a built-in noise-canceling filter that worked very well in my multiplayer sessions.

COMFORTABLE CANS
These cans are plush, oversized, and comfortable. Unfortunately, I consistently found myself hitting the volume control on the left earpiece.

PLANTRONICS GAMECOM 780 HEADSET

Comfort and surround sound on the cheap? Sign me up | Words: George Jones

Plantronics's GameCom 780 Surround Sound Gaming Headset is a remarkable work of engineering at a surprisingly low price.

This 580 USB headset for PCs taps into Dolby's surround technology to deliver multi-positional 7.1 audio that actually works.

At first I was underwhelmed by the GameCom 780 headset in pure stereo mode. It wasn't necessarily bad, but while playing medium-res 192kbps music, I found the bass response and mid-range tones wanting.

However, once I installed the surround-enabling software and played a few games (*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, *Skyrim*, and *Rage*), I changed my tune. In this mode the positional effects—including the bass—are incredible. And, more than a few times, I found myself turning in my chair in response to surround sound effects.

Plantronics also had gamers' comfort in mind with this headset. The plush oversized ear cans are comfortable and wearable for hours. Plus, they fit perfectly over my larger-than-average ears. Hey, that has to count for something, right?

afGamer

PLANTRONICS GAMECOM 780

Manufacturer: Plantronics
www.plantronics.com
Price: $79.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4

TRITTON XBOX 360 PRIMER WIRELESS STEREO HEADSET

Crystal-clear wireless audio, but only in stereo

Words: George Jones

TRITTON XBOX 360 PRIMER WIRELESS STEREO HEADSET
Manufacturer: Tritton
www.frittonusa.com
Price: $99.99

OVERALL SCORE: 3.5

For late-night gamers, the ability to untether the cable running from your TV or stereo to your couch continues to be underrated. Because of this, I'm always excited to test new wireless gaming headsets, even if the word "wireless" isn't entirely accurate for Xbox 360 headsets. (To use the mic, you have to plug the headset into your Xbox 360 controller.)

The good news about Tritton's new model is that it works quite well. It's sturdily built, looks nice, and produces crystal clear stereo sounds with plenty of bass-response, which is important for gaming.

The bad news is that while it sounds great, this headset is only capable of producing stereo sound. Given the dynamic surround-sound engineering in today's console games, this feels like a huge shortcoming, especially when spending just $20 or $30 more will get you wireless surround sound in the form of Turtle Beach's Ear Force.

STEALTH DESIGN
The Tritton headset's sturdy, minimalist design incorporates volume controls and mute functions on the left ear.

5.8GHZ WIRELESS SIGNAL
This wireless base station delivers crystal-clear audio. However, you only get stereo effects.

MIC
The microphone elicites rave reviews because it's 1) completely flexible and 2) easily concealed when you don't want to use it.

COMFORT COUNTS
The soft foam earcups and headband make these headphones gameworthy for long stretches of time.

IN THE MIX
Rocketfish uses a handy inline controller that allows you to adjust volume, mute, and surround effects.

LOOK MA, NO MIC!
This headset comes with a convenient detachable mic that you can attach to either side of the unit

ROCKETFISH GAMING HEADSET WITH 3D SOUND

Booming audio for games and music Words: George Jones

For music and games, the quality of this headset at the high-, low-, and mid-range sound levels far exceeded my expectations for the $70 price point.

Rocketfish's cans use SRS WOW technology to reproduce sound in a 3D space. It's not as effective as Dolby-certified multi-positional audio, but in conjunction with the superior speaker tech, it does improve the depth of your gaming experience.

The only problem is that using this headset with an Xbox 360 or PS3 is an awkward, gangly experience that made me wish these headphones were the wireless ones that are $20 more. You're required to plug into numerous audio ports, including the controller itself, and the end result feels decidedly cyborg-ish.

On the plus side, however, the stylish, comfortable black matte finish and the ability to plug the microphone into either earcup earn Rocketfish a few extra brownie points. The extra-long cable is also nice, though it makes using these with a PC a little cumbersome.

AI Gamer

ROCKETFISH GAMING HEADSET WITH 3D SOUND

Manufacturer: Rocketfish
www.rocketfishproducts.com
Price: $69.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4

NYKO POWER GRIP FOR NINTENDO 3DS

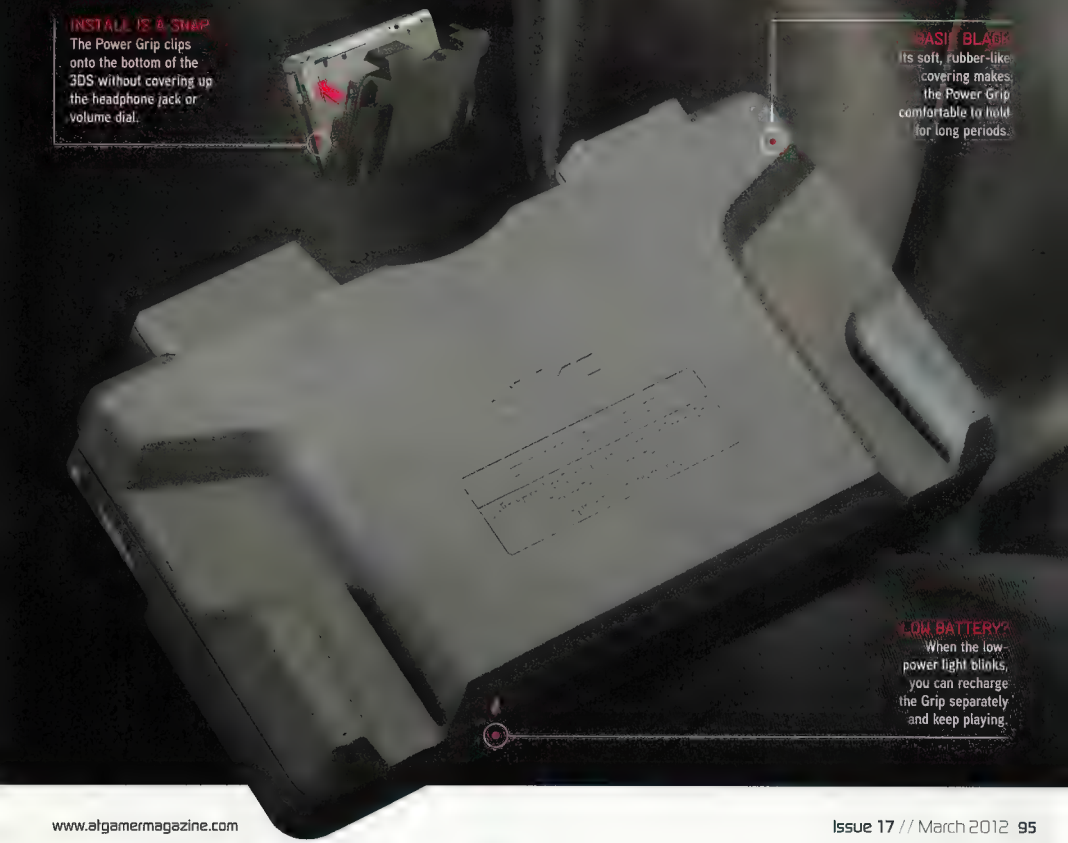
NYKO POWER GRIP FOR NINTENDO 3DS
Manufacturer: Nyko
www.nyko.com
Price: $29.99
OVERALL SCORE: 4

3X the power for your 3DS · Words: Chuck Osborn

Perhaps the biggest limitation of the Nintendo 3DS is its abysmally short battery life. At just about three hours of playtime, it won't last the length of most interstate flights, much less a road trip, which is why getting a battery extender for the 3D portable is a must for gamers on the go.

Nyko's Power Grip boasts that it'll give you three times the power of the 3DS's stock battery. In my real-world testing—playing games on a long flight, leaving it on standby mode, watching Netflix—it largely lived up to its promise, though results may vary. For example, if you've got Wi-Fi switched on, the volume cranked, and 3D mode on high, don't expect a full nine hours of playtime.

To install, you simply snap the Power Grip onto the bottom of your 3DS. While it makes the unit a little thicker (by about a third) and noticeably heavier, it's comfortable to hold. My quibbles are that the Grip's protruding lip makes removing the stylus from its storage slot harder, and the 3DS can dislodge while in transit. Also, it's hard to know how much extra-power remains. Still, the Power Grip is an affordable and effective solution to your depleted battery blues.

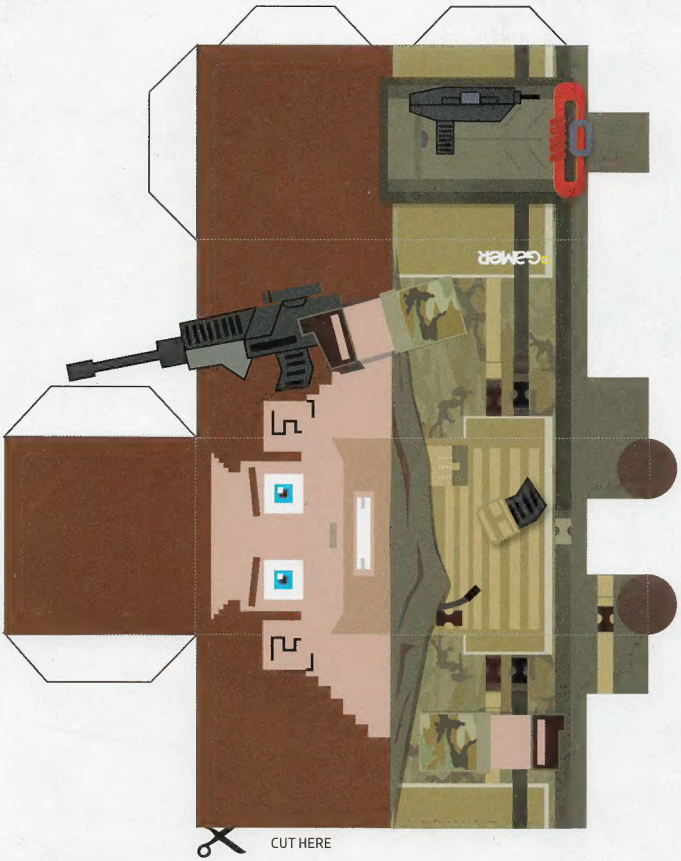

INSTALL IS A SNAP
The Power Grip clips onto the bottom of the 3DS without covering up the headphone jack or volume dial.
BASIC BLACK
Its soft, rubber-like covering makes the Power Grip comfortable to hold for long periods.
LOW BATTERY?
When the low-power light blinks, you can recharge the Grip separately and keep playing.

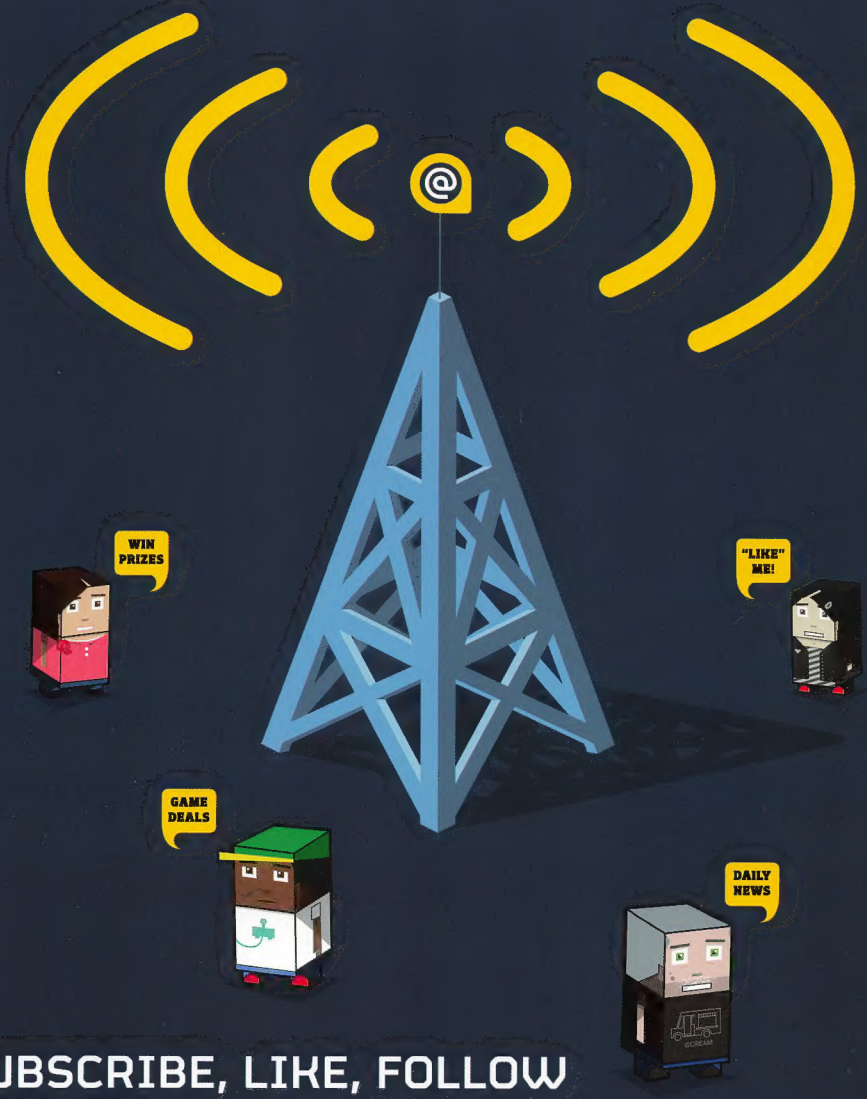
PAPERCRAFT

ASSEMBLE AND COLLECT @GAMER PAPERCRAFT CUTOUTS!

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

Want thicker, larger, and genuinely more awesome papercraft? Head over to www.atgamermagazine.com, download our papercraft, and print it out on the paper of your choice.





SUBSCRIBE, LIKE, FOLLOW

JOIN @GAMER ONLINE:

PODCAST: Subscribe on iTunes or go to atgamerpodcast.com
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/ATGAMER
GOOGLE+: Search "@GAMER Magazine"
TWITTER: @GAMER

© 2012 Voyetra Turtle Beach, Inc. (VTB, Inc.) All rights reserved. Turtle Beach and the Turtle Beach Logo are either trademarks or registered trademarks of VTB, Inc. Dolby and the double-D symbol are trademarks of Dolby Laboratories. All other trademarks are properties of their respective companies and are hereby acknowledged.

Made with love by

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so that they are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at retromags.com.

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!